

The
OLD
BLOOD
PALMER

The
OLD BLOOD
FREDERICK PALMER

THE OLD BLOOD

BOOKS OF FREDERICK PALMER

GOING TO WAR IN GREECE

THE WAYS OF THE SERVICE

THE VAGABOND

WITH KUROKI IN MANCHURIA

OVER THE PASS

THE LAST SHOT

MY YEAR OF THE GREAT WAR

THE OLD BLOOD

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BY

FREDERICK PALMER

Author of "The Vagabond," "The Last Shot," "My Year
of the Great War," Etc.



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THE OLD BLOOD



THE OLD BLOOD

CHAPTER I

A HOME-COMING

PERHAPS a real story-teller, who leaps into the heart of things, would have begun this story in France instead of with a railroad journey from the Southwest to New England; perhaps he would have taken the view of "our Philip's" mother that Phil fought the whole war in Europe himself; perhaps given the story the name of "The Plain Girl," leaving Phil secondary place.

A veracious chronicler, consulting Phil's wishes, makes his beginning with a spring afternoon of 1914, when the Berkshire slopes were dripping and glistening and smiling and the air, washed by showers and purified by a burst of sunshine, was like some rare vintage which might be drunk only on the premises.

Complaining in a familiar way as it followed the course of a winding stream, which laughed in flashes of pearly white over rocky shallows, the train ran out into a broad valley—the home valley. Not a road that he had not tramped

over; not a woodland path that he did not know; not a mountain trail that he had not climbed. The scene was bred in his blood.

If Bill Hurley were at the station the auguries would be right, and there he was, standing on the same spot where he had stood for twenty years when the trains arrived; there, too, the stooped old station agent in his moment of bustling importance. By the calendar of Bill's chin it was Tuesday; for Bill shaved only on Sunday and Wednesday afternoons. A man of observation and opinion this keeper of the gate of Longfield, who let the world come to him and took charge of its baggage and conveyed its persons to their destinations. He was also a dispenser of news.

"The Jerrods have got that new porch," he said. "They'd been talking about it so long that they're sort of lost-minded and dumb these days. And Hanks has put in a new soda fountain and plate glass windows. Ambitious man, Hanks. Nothing can keep him from branching out."

"And nothing can change you, Bill."

"Me? I guess not. May wither a little when the winters are hard, but you'll find me here fifty years from now. H-m-m!" after looking Phil over. Bound to happen to young fellers out of college. Noticed it often. Something rubbed off you and something rubbed in out West, I judge."

"You have it—and in one of your epigrams, as usual," Phil agreed.

"Folks do say that I have a tolerable understanding of human nature, not to mention a sententious way of saying things, which I've always said comes from handling trunks. Hear you're going to Europe."

"Always well informed!" Phil affirmed.

"Never denied it. Well, you've earned the rip Three years out there. Made good, too, everybody says. Soon as you've seen your folks and eat your veal, you and me must have a talk about old times. Trunk and suit case? Right! Have 'em up in a quarter of an hour."

Beyond the station was the old wooden bridge, which spanned the river here running deep and sluggish under drooping, solicitous willows. Then the avenue of maples; and at the end of the vista of deep shade, in the bright light of the little square, the statue of a strenuous gentleman in bronze who, sword in hand, was charging British redcoats. For Longfield had a real work of art, though not all Longfield appreciated the fact yet and certain Puritan sections were inclined to regard anything called a work of art with suspicion.

In boyhood Phil had heard so much about the hero at home that he seemed a bore. To-day that spirited, indomitable figure gave him a thrill. With a fresh eye he realised its quality and some-

thing deeper than that in a wave of personal gratitude to a famous sculptor, also a son of Longfield, known in other lands where the ancestor was unknown, who had taken the commission out of civic pride for a small fee and the satisfaction of putting his best into a chivalrous subject after having received a large fee for doing a statesman in a frock for the grounds of a State capital.

Phil recalled how his father and mother and the Sons of the Revolution, and also the Daughters thereof, had favoured a full Continental uniform for the hero. But the sculptor had had enough of coats. Not lacking in that pithiness of expression which is salad to genius, he had told the family and societies and committees and all such that either he would have his way or they could employ a mortuary chiseller and a tailor, who would gratify their conceptions of martial dignity by clothing a gallant gentleman who had fought free-limbed on a hot August day in an overcoat, muffler and mittens and two suits of underclothes, which would have meant death to freedom from sunstroke and that the Declaration of Independence might be a relic in the British Museum.

Coatless, hatless, sleeves rolled and shirt open at the throat, young and lean, with every fibre attuned to conflict, the "rebel" who had helped to found a nation now served the purpose not of

stopping a British charge, but of bringing touring automobiles to a standstill while their occupants appreciated, either by virtue of their own taste or by the desire to be in fashion with the taste of their superiors, what many considered to be the best work of a master, in contrast with the graveyard effigies, which had the martial spirit of Alaskan totem poles, from the same mould in other squares, to glorify the deeds of local regiments in the Civil War.

Longfield was proud of the statue because it attracted so much attention and because it was Longfield's and yet resentful because it attracted more attention than the elms. Tourists thought that other villages had equally as noble elms as Longfield—equally patched and scarred. Longfield knew better. Its elms were without comparison. From the selectmen's point of view the cost of nursing was considerable, too, which gave further merit over the statue, which cost nothing for upkeep.

Besides, the elms were old when the hero was a child. They marked the epoch of the village's birth, even as the maples marked that of the railroad's coming. Nothing in Old England is quite as old as New England. Not even the pyramids are as old as a New England elm. Europe may repair and renovate cathedrals; New England repairs and renovates elms. The Puritan Fathers planted trees on such broad main

streets as that of Longfield, with stretches of green border of old turf now curving around the massive trunks that supported their stately plumes—a street which Phil saw in its age, its serenity and its spring freshness with the appreciation of one come from the Southwest, plus the call of old association which absence strengthens. To him the Berkshires were the hills of all hills; Longfield the village of villages; this street the street of streets; and the most majestic elm stood beside a path which led to the house of houses. Home-coming had kindled his sentiment. He had been long enough out of college not to be ashamed of a little of it, if he did not have to mention it to anybody.

It was this mood in its desire to find all home picture, unchanged that had kept him from naming his train; and he had taken one arriving in the afternoon in the hope of witnessing the scene which was set for that hour in the routine of the Reverend Doctor and Mrs. Sanford, of Longfield. Their chairs in the accustomed places on the porch, the father was reading and the mother sewing in their conscious and unspoken companionship. What a delightful pair of sequestered old dears they were! How worldly he felt beside them!

They had not heard his steps. He paused until his mother should see him, for he knew that she would be the first to look up. When she

did, her little outcry, as she put her hand impulsively on the doctor's knee to draw the attention of an absent-minded husband, was also entirely in keeping with his anticipation and with the dependability of habit in Longfield, which was not the least of its charms. She was well on her way to meet him before his father had taken off his spectacles and placed the marker in his book. After Philip had embraced them they were silent, taking in the reality of him who had been so long absent and possibly a little awed at the presence of this sturdy, tanned only son—come to them late when they had almost given up ever having any children—who had been out battling with that world which was confusing and forbidding to them.

He slipped his arm around his mother's waist. She took his hand in hers with a fluttering of mothering impulse, as he directed their steps by the side path which led to the garden, while the father brought up the rear.

"You've been successful, Phillie," she said, the thought uppermost in mind coming out first. "It was such an undertaking and we're so pleased." She might have said proud, but that was a vain word. Self-warned about the weakness of parents with only sons, it had been her rule never to spoil Phil with praise.

"Yes, I've done pretty well for a——" and

he glanced around at his father in the freemasonry of a settled comradeship.

"For a minister's son!" put in the father, chuckling.

"I had to," Philip proceeded. "I was right up against it. It was rough stuff at first and Mexico the limit!"

"What language!" exclaimed the father, who could be a purist on occasion.

"Very expressive!" said the mother, defending her son. "It must have been rough, indeed." She would have forgiven Philip if he had said damn that afternoon.

"In other words," observed the Reverend Dr. Sanford, "when it came to the rough stuff Philip was no piker! I've been studying up so as to make you feel at home," he added, with another chuckle.

"What do you think my first job was?" Phil said. "I didn't tell you that. It was cleaning out cattle cars."

"Oh, Phil, no!" She looked down at her son's hands as if wondering how such horrors could be.

"He has washed them since," observed the father.

"Now you're both up to your old tricks, teasing me!" she said admonishingly. "And, Phil—lie"—she pressed a point of unsatisfied maternal curiosity which his letters had never answered

—"you never told us why it was that you did not go to work for Peter—that is, your side of it. You seem to have had a quarrel with him."

In a sense Peter Smithers was one of the Sanford family. He had been a clever village boy whom Phil's grandfather had taken under his wing some forty years ago, and the type of clever village boy who does not need sheltering wings for long. Middle age found him the head of a great manufacturing business in New Jersey. Hieing homeward, New England fashion, he had built himself a big country place back in the hills, which he referred to as "my little farm." People spoke of him as a millionaire, but he insisted that he was dirt poor. He was a bachelor, with no heirs, a fact which Mrs. Sanford, more practical than the clergyman, could never forget when she thought of the future of her son.

"What was Peter's side?" Phil asked.

"He said that you didn't want to begin at the bottom of the ladder."

"And yet he began at the bottom of a cattle car," said the father.

"I didn't mind a humble beginning," said Phil, "but from the way that Peter spoke I was afraid there wasn't in his establishment a place so humble but if I took it I might be the ruin of his business. You see, mother, I was cleaning out

those cattle cars on the orders of a stranger. I knew that he was not hiring me because my grandfather had done him a favour."

"Peter did not mean it that way. It's only his manner," persisted his mother. "I think he was really hurt about it. I suppose you know that he is going to give all his money for founding a school and club for his employees. He talks of nothing else."

"I can hear him, mother."

But there Peter and his eccentricities and philanthropic projects vanished from mind at sight of an expense of gingham apron filling the kitchen doorway and covering the ample form of Jane, grinning and beneficent, who, as she herself said, was no skittish young thing who didn't know a good place when she had it, which accounted for the Sanfords having retained their general houseworker.

Diplomacy and gratitude demanded that homage be paid to Jane; and affection which began with childhood greeted Patrick, the gardener, leaning on his hoe and sucking in his pipe, as Phil had seen him a thousand times. Unchanged the garden with its bounteous colour, its perfume, and green and budding and flowering promise of plenty in that little world walled in by larches from the neighbours on either side in the village world in turn walled in by the hills, gone golden in high lights and dark in shadows in the re-

cesses of the woods with the lowering slant of the sun's rays.

"There is no place like it," said Phil. "My roots are in this soil as deep as the elms."

Unchanged Patrick, whose articulation was sufficient indication without explanation that he had not yet brought himself to wear store teeth except at funerals and on Sundays, or on any other occasion when he wore a starched collar.

"Strawberries are ripe," said Jane. "Do you still like strawberry shortcake, Phillie?"

"M-m-m—yes!"

"That sounds natural. It's the way you used to say it when you was little. Lord, but you did have an appetite down to your soles! Now, see here——" Jane squared herself, eyeing him very sternly.

"Yes, Jane?"

"Do you think that your mother can make better strawberry shortcake than me?"

"Jane, the excellence of your puddings is known far beyond this valley; your biscuits would melt in the mouth of a polar explorer, and your bisque of tomato is surpassed only by your——"

Phil used to talk to her in this way when he was home on holidays, at once pleasing and convincing her that he was really getting a college education; but she was not to be put off by any verbal trickery this time.

"Speak ou' sir!" she insisted.

"Then, mother can."

"Good!" said Jane. "I wouldn't think much of any man who didn't think his mother could make better strawberry shortcake than any hired girl that ever lived. Always stand up for your own flesh and blood, I say, even if your mother can't make better strawberry shortcake 'n me—which in my opinion she can't."

Discreetly he withdrew from the miracle-working in the kitchen after his mother had put on a big apron, and followed Dr. Sanford into the study. Among the rows of books which made the wall invisible from floor to ceiling were several written by Dr. Sanford, which were considered of some account by students of theology.

"You will be going to England?" he asked, as they sat down.

"Yes, and to France and Germany, a quick trip of it."

"Your first to Europe. I envy you going in your youth, for I went in my youth. Germany, too, eh? The Teutonic influence is spreading in all our universities. We are in the age of materialism. Of course you'll visit our cousin in Hampshire. I have written a letter of introduction."

He took up an envelope addressed to the Reverend Arthur Sanford, The Vicarage, Truckleford, Hants, England. Philip took out the letter and read:

"MY DEAR COUSIN:

"Since my long letter of a few days ago my son, the bearer, whom I have so often described that you must feel as if you knew him, has returned from the West, where his success has been such that he can afford the trip to Europe which I might not give him myself as I wished after his graduation from college. My first thought on learning the news was that you should see him and that he should pay his respects to you.

"I only hope that you may see your way clear to return with him for a visit, which would bring you here in time for our sweet corn season and the autumn colouring.

"My wife's recipe for strawberry shortcake is enclosed, and if strawberries are still in season with you it is possible for you to enjoy this American institution at home. I shall send you another Virginia ham in the autumn, unless you will come to fetch it yourself.

"With my regards to your Mrs. Sanford, in which my Mrs. Sanford joins, I am,

"Sincerely yours,

"FRANKLIN SANFORD.

"P. S. I think you will find that our Philip has a sense both of humour and of proportion. If there be any fault to his manners, they come from his father and not his mother, who has done her best to bring us both up properly."

The Reverend Arthur, of England, was about the sixteenth cousin of the Reverend Franklin.

Of course the progenitor of the family came over with William the Conqueror, whose transports seem to have been as overcrowded as the *Mayflower*. But this did not concern Philip, particularly not while he was in Mexico.

"You may meet two other cousins, the Ribots," said Dr. Sanford, "younger and more interesting to you, perhaps, than the vicar of Truckleford."

"Yes, I remember something about them." Philip was more hazy than ever about genealogy since he had been in the Southwest. "Girls, and about my age, aren't they?"

"Yes. Henriette is about two years and Helen one year younger than you. They have French, English, and American blood. One of their grandfathers was French and the other English, which is where the Sanford comes in, and one of the grandmothers was an American, on their mother's side, and married a Frenchman. They live in France and are very French. You will find the vicar of Truckleford very English."

"That, I believe, is a characteristic of the English!" said Phil.

"You will have a chance to see a real English home. It was June when I was there, too."

Dr. Sanford fell into reminiscence about his own trip of thirty years ago, until he was interrupted by the arrival of Phil's trunk.

"In the guest room," said the mother, coming in from the kitchen.

"My own old room!" urged Phil, and she capitulated joyously.

Her call came up the stairs when dinner was ready as it had a thousand times. The cloth was laid on the side veranda, with the setting sun their candelabra and their champagne the rare New England air, which makes one live an hour in a minute. It is not for history to say how much shortcake Phil ate. Jane wondered if he had had anything to eat all the time he had been away. He and his mother did the talking, while Dr. Sanford listened. The twilight still held when a motor came up the drive.

"Peter! I was sure he'd call as soon as he heard you were here," said the mother.

The nervous little man who came around the corner of the house gave every sign of surprise at seeing Philip, though his dry, "Back, eh?" as he shook hands with Phil was hardly effusive. But Peter was not given to effusion about anything except his own projects, and they were so interesting that he could never change the subject. He was off about the clubhouse as soon as he sat down, directing his talking to Dr. and Mrs. Sanford and quite overlooking Phil's presence.

"System is the great thing, system without sentiment!" he began, in his pet phrase; "systematic economy of space, time, energy, and money, which means more money. Got the

question of baths settled for my clubhouse. Showers—no waste, no favouritism. You put two cents in the slot and you get three quarts hot for soaping and another cent and you get three gallons cold for shower. Those that don't want to soap pay only one cent. Get it? Those that take only the cold don't have to pay for heating for the others. Everybody pays for what he gets—justice, equality, democracy, and the square deal for all. Those that don't bathe often can put in another two cents and get six quarts for soaping, without sponging on the fellows that bathe every day. Anybody that wants to remain dirty—individual rights respected. Took the idea to one of those scientific socialist professors and he thought it was all right, only, so far as I could make out from his rigmarole, he thought the State ought to put the cents in the slot and the employers earn the cents for the State. I told him Peter Smithers wasn't any socialist; he didn't believe in a pap-fed proletariat. Now, take another thing—I tell you I'm giving a lot of thought to this——”

“Have you laid the cornerstone of the clubhouse yet?” Phil asked.

“Young man, if you knew me well you'd know I never go off half-cocked. If they don't raise the tariff there won't be any cents to put in the slots. I'll have to close the works. Hear you're going to Europe? Hear they've promoted you

and brought you to the New York office?" he inquired more affably, as if something were due to Phil, whom he had regarded sharply, without pretending to, in intervals between sentences.

"And he showed how willing he was to begin at the bottom by what do you think?—by cleaning out cattle cars!" put in Mrs. Sanford, striving for reconciliation.

"I thought he would have to come off his high horse before he could earn a living," Peter replied, feeling himself vindicated.

"No, it's a part of the initiation," said Phil softly, "for youngsters who are taken on by that railroad after they leave college. I expected it and I've had my revenge by setting other graduate engineers at it myself. And, Uncle Peter," Phil was smiling and showing a row of well-set teeth through his tan, "let's you and I understand each other and be friends. Perhaps you think that I sometimes think that you'll leave your fortune to me. I know that you will not. Of course, I should like it, but there's no reason why you should give it to me more than to any one else. All I ask is an invitation to the clubhouse when it's dedicated. Why, if I had gone to work for you I might have been thinking that I might inherit something and you might have known I was thinking that, which would have been most uncomfortable for both of us. Then if the tariff

had ruined the business and you had lost everything, consider how disappointed I would be and what heartbreak the knowledge of my disappointment would be to you in your poverty!"

Peter grew red during a silence which was broken by the sound of a chuckle. Evidently Dr. Sanford had seen something in the garden that amused him, for he was looking in that direction. Mrs. Sanford was aghast.

"Of all the nerve!" exclaimed Peter. "I tell you I'm not used to having anybody talk to me that way! It's a d——"

"Go ahead, Peter!" remarked Dr. Sanford suavely. "It's just as bad to think it. If you say one hard you may not have a dozen pent-up ones against you on Judgment Day."

"There seems no pleasing you!" Peter blurted incontinently to Phil.

"Then do you want me to hover about and play the good young man and agree with everything you say, hoping you will mention me in your will?"

"I—I want you to shut up!" snapped Peter. "Or, you can keep on talking if you want to, as it's time for me to go!" and he took his injured dignity down the walk to his waiting car.

After he had gone Dr. Sanford gave his chuckle such full vent that it broke into an explosion little short of a snort.

"I suppose there is something of the anarchist

in me," he said; "but I confess to liking to see a self-conscious, self-made millionaire a trifle miserable, without, I trust, in the least compromising my standing as a good Christian."

"Peter was certainly funny," assented Mrs. Sanford, smiling now.

Then they forget Peter, these three. They forget everything but the fact that they were together. The detail of their talk Phil could hardly have recollected the next day, but every sentence of it came to him when he was prostrate in that noiseless and sightless world in France.

After the proud old pair were under the coverlets that night their theme was the same that it had been a thousand times. Following generations of professors, doctors, and lawyers had come the man of action. Philip had succeeded out in that forbidding world of business and strife: this was the wonderful thing to them.

"He's changed," said the mother.

"Three years older," said the father. "The world has humanised him, made him fonder of us."

"And didn't you think that he looked more like our ancestor?" Mrs. Sanford always referred to the man in the square as "ours."

"Yes, the old blood. Action reappears and likeness of feature. What relation are those two Ribot girls? I was trying to think."

"About seventeenth," said Mrs. Sanford dreamily.

"What a lot of cousins they would make if they all stood in a row!" mused Dr. Sanford.

CHAPTER II

TWO GIRLS ON A TRAIN

HIS object being to see England and not to become a member of the menagerie of home types in a pile overlooking the Thames Embankment, the hotel that Philip had chosen was a small one, where a truly English headwaiter, who was not trying to conceal a German accent, treated him with a lofty courtesy and his bath was brought by a maid instead of by the labour-saving device of pipes.

"You rise very early," said the young woman in black at the desk.

"The King did not know that I was coming and I do just as I please," Phil replied; and she unbent a little from her dignity and almost laughed.

Against the criterion of all sniffy people who talk of how many times they have been abroad, which sometimes means only a journey from the London to the Paris and the Paris to the Berlin menageries, he was frankly one of the horde of tourists, rising at dawn to make sightseeing a diligent business, who are assiduously cultivated by shopkeepers if somewhat neglected by the

nobility. When he moved on the Tower, Westminster Abbey, or Oxford, he made no attempt to conceal his red guidebook. He was at home with schoolmistresses from the Middle West doing a schedule on a set sum or with the wealthy acquaintance he had made on board ship who took him for a motor ride to Canterbury.

Now he was on the way to Truckleford to spend the night, in response to the invitation of the sixteenth degree cousin. Up to the moment of starting he thought that he should have the compartment to himself, when two young women appeared, both a trifle short of breath. So impressionable a tourist as himself could not fail to notice that the one who entered first was strikingly good-looking, a girl with a quality of manner and dress which he associated with the Continent, though he had never been there.

"We caught it, at any rate!" she gasped, dropping into a seat.

"Just about!" said the other, who was as distinctly plain at first glance as the other was attractive. "But your run has given you a lovely colour!" she added admiringly. If the one wished to be shown up by contrast for her beauty and the other for her plainness, they had an object in travelling together.

"My hair must be in a shocking state, though," said the beautiful one, as Phil already designated her in his mind.

She drew a mirror from her bag, not to look at her colouring, of course, but to arrange a few strands of hair. Turning her head this way and that, she attended to the disarray due to her haste in dressing perhaps, as well as to her rush for the train. If a woman's hand and arm and the particular way she holds her fingers when she shepherds strands of hair were more awkward, possibly fewer strands would need attention in public. There is something confidential in these quick fondling movements which have drawn a reader's eyelashes above the margin of a newspaper many millions of times. This girl made it an unusually graceful and leisurely function; and once, when her glance met Phil's, it seemed not to see that any person was opposite to her, yet it said: "I know that others are not displeased with what I see in the mirror; then why should I be?"

The plain girl also had some riotously stray strands of hair, but they did not concern her. It was not for her to find friendliness in mirrors.

"Here I am riding the way that the train is going when I like the other way!" she said, jumping up. "Let us change places."

"You dear mouse! You're always so thoughtful!" said the other beautiful one, complying.

Now she was facing Phil. Reminded that the suburbs of London were so uninteresting that he might be caught staring at a face short of the

window instead of looking out it, he began to read his paper diligently. When they had left the chimney pots behind, he found that the plain one's objection to riding the way that the train was going apparently no longer applied; for she crossed over in a sudden, impulsive movement which seemed characteristic of a restless nature and with a sweeping gesture out of the window began talking of familiar landmarks.

Evidently both had been long absent from England, which was not their home. They mixed French with English in that bi-lingual facility which does not mean an interlarding of words but bursts of sentences. They criticised and compared what they saw with the Continent, and of the two the plain one seemed to get more enthusiasm out of their return.

Having both faces in the tail of his eye, Phil wondered why the plain one should ever want to travel in the other's company. He drifted into a comparative analysis of the two: the one with her masses of black hair, her small forehead, her luminous eyes, straight nose and expressive mouth, with its full lips and the oval chin—a classic type of its kind; the other with chestnut hair also in masses, but brushed unbecomingly back from the high, broad forehead, the large, black-brown eyes wide apart, a squarish chin and a lump of a nose. Yet analysed there was a resemblance; the genius touch of a sculptor might

have transformed one face if it were plastic into the other. The features of one made an ensemble; those of the other were assertively in rebellion with one another.

But the amazing likeness was in the voices. Closing his eyes, Phil had difficulty in telling which one of the two was speaking. Both voices were pleasant, though the beautiful girl's voice seemed much the pleasanter of the two when his eyes were open and the plain one's an imitation.

He thought he should like to get acquainted, but he had not the courage. He could not offer them papers or magazines when evidently they were not in a mood to read. Besides, that sort of thing is not done in England, or, for that matter, in America, as a rule, on short train journeys. Except for that one glance from the beautiful one, which was to any human being in sight as an audience, he had no sign that they recognised that there was any one else in the compartment.

"I shall be glad to be in Truckleford again, shan't you?" asked the plain girl.

"Of course I shall! I can see Uncle Arthur waiting on the platform for us now."

"And hear him say Henriette, my dear, and Helen, my dear!"

Then they were surprised by the young man opposite them declaring that he must be about their

seventeenth degree cousin and that he was going to Truckleford, too.

"Really!" they exclaimed together.

He might have known what they would say. He had wondered if Americans used guess as often as the English use really. There are many kinds of reallys: forbidding, surprised, sceptical, inquiring. This was all kinds. It was also the kind that leaves the next move with the other person.

"That is, if the Reverend Arthur Sanford, of Truckleford," Phil explained, "is my sixteenth cousin and you are Henriette and Helen Ribot, and my father, the Reverend Franklin Sanford, of Longfield, Massachusetts, has reckoned accurately."

"It sounds very mathematical," said Helen, the plain one, thoughtfully, looking toward Henriette to take the lead, which she did charmingly.

"We've heard about you, Cousin Philip Sanford," she said, and her eyes were sparkling into his in a way that made it difficult to look away; "let us consider ourselves introduced."

There was a touch of the grand manner about the way she did this; in part it was mischievous, her eyes said. But she did it delightfully, and Helen, who held out her hand in turn, seemed plainer than ever. But she arrested his attention with her remark:

"I had a suspicion that it was you all the time."

"Why?"

"You'll see, later." He was conscious of a closer scrutiny of his features, and she added triumphantly: "Yes, you'll see, later."

Then she sank back on the cushions. When seventeenth cousin meets seventeenth cousin for the first time there is enough to say. Helen looked from one to the other, listening. It seemed her natural rôle. Phil almost forgot her existence until the train stopped at Truckleford and they stepped down on the station platform to be welcomed by an elderly clergyman.

"Taller than your father! I like the Sanfords to be tall," he said to Phil. "And, Henriette, now I have you I'll not let you go all summer. You can do your painting here." He gave her a fond glance. "And you, Helen, you will have to stay if Henriette stays."

CHAPTER III

AN INVITATION

THE tea-table, a damask moor on the lawn of the vicarage, was laid awaiting their arrival and the white-haired woman who presided welcomed Phil with the simple cordiality of a near relative.

"You don't have afternoon tea in America, I believe?" she said.

"Please pour me a cup and see an American in England make a brave effort," Phil said.

"And what do you think of Truckleford? Is it like what you imagined?" she asked.

He had a more definite impression of Henriette, who had told him about the village as they walked from the station, than of the village itself. It seemed to him like any other English village.

"The great thing is that my ancestors came from here," he said. "I have wondered what the place was like and what they were like. My father had given such rosy descriptions of everything that I was afraid I might be disappointed. But both of you and the vicarage and the garden

and the church are just as I wanted you and them to be. It's like home."

The vicar and his wife exchanged glances of satisfaction. They were not displeased with the frank American cousin.

"We come to serious matters," said the vicar. "I passed the recipe for strawberry shortcake which your father sent over to my wife. There my part ends. I wait for her to report."

"Cook has the recipe," said Mrs. Sanford. "I am not responsible for results."

"Nor I," Phil said, "unless I assist in picking the berries. Have they been picked yet?"

"Not yet, I think."

"I'll bring the basket," said Helen Ribot. "We'll all help, if that is allowed."

"You wouldn't fully appreciate it if you did not help," Phil assured her.

"No, I'll bring the basket," Henriette insisted. "If one did not watch you you'd never let any one do anything for one's self."

"I foresee a success," said Phil.

He was thinking of the auspices more than of the cook's part as he watched Henriette pass around the corner of the house. When she reappeared his glance happened to be resting on the same spot. She stopped, waving her hand in a way that let the sleeve fall back from the graceful forearm to signify that she was ready,

most enchantingly ready, for the strawberry shortcake adventure.

"Isn't she beautiful!" Helen exclaimed.
"Aren't you proud of your seventeenth cousin?"

"Helen!" admonished Mrs. Sanford. "You must not say such things."

"Oh, but I agree, quite enthusiastically!" said Phil.

He had no reason to change his mind as he assisted her in picking the berries, an operation which brought his head so close to hers that one of the strands of her hair brushed his cheek. Her quick gesture restoring the truant to place prolonged the thrill that had proceeded from the point of contact, with an intimation of self-consciousness on her part as well as on his. Helen was picking, too, but always on the other side of the basket. At length she left off in order to answer questions about her mother and affairs at home in France, which Mrs. Sanford had foreborne asking at tea.

When the basket was filled the vicar planned to show Phil the graves of his ancestors in the little churchyard, but Henriette forestalled him with the suggestion that the younger generation take a walk before dinner.

"Aren't you coming?" she called to Helen as she started toward the gate with Phil.

"No. I'll stay with uncle and aunt," said Helen hesitatingly.

"Seventeenth cousins from America don't appear often," Phil put in, perhaps a bit lukewarmly.

Helen shook her head.

"Oh, please, that's a good mouse!" urged Henriette.

"No!" said Helen, a sharpness in her voice unlike Henriette's now and a flash of what seemed pent-up irritation in her eyes.

It was not an agreeable exhibition, Phil thought. But Henriette smiled as if accustomed to such outbreaks, explaining in an aside:

"Train-riding always tires her. You mustn't mind her abruptness. She has more fire, is more French, than I am."

They had gone only a few steps when Helen ran after them. She was flushed, with a singular, penitent look in her eyes, and the voice of Henriette might have been continuing softly as she said:

"Please, I didn't mean to be tempery. But I had planned to do something and I'll arrange the flowers for the table."

"You are always together, quite inseparable, you and Helen," said Phil, after they were through the gate.

"Yes. Isn't it lucky to have a sister only a year apart from you?" said Henriette. "We're quite different, but surely you've noted the resemblance in our voices. I have tried to change

mine and she has tried to change hers, for there was something uncanny about it, but neither of us could quite. It's been a greater cross to mother than to us, though I can't see, why when we are so different in other ways, can you?"

He could not when Henriette's wonderful eyes were putting the question to him at the same time as her lips, in a way that made the difference a contrast.

"I'll show you my favourite walk," she said.

It took them into a lane and on high ground, where the village lay nestling at their feet, a greyish patch in the pattern-work of hedges. The beauty of the landscape to him was in its suggestion, no less than in its appeal to the eye. Many generations of men had laid their bones in this earth after having given it their strength in return for life.

"I understand how that first Sanford who went across the water on that adventure which took rare courage in those days," said Phil, "harked back to this scene which was bred in his blood. and how other scenes in other climates became bred in the blood of his grandsons."

"It is much as our ancestors saw it, I fancy," Henriette said. "I'm bred into it somewhat, but more into France."

"A little into America, too," he suggested. "You have some American blood."

She was thoughtful for a moment, then looked up at him brightly.

"Perhaps. Why not? Though I've never been to America. There is a walk in the neighbourhood of our chateau at Mervaux which I should like to show you. I'm fonder of it than of this, I confess."

"And I've a favourite walk I should like to show you in the Berkshires," he said.

"A seventeenth cousin reunion in walks, is that it?" She was smiling at her own suggestion with a confidential nod.

"Bully!"

"No, you should say ripping in England. Bully is an American vulgarism, Cousin Phil."

"Ripping!"

They broke out laughing at this, and the best feature of her laughter was the persistent radiance in her eyes. A passing labourer who noted the pair silhouetted against the skyline thought:

"Life is sweet to them—youth and good looks."

She returned to the subject of walks.

"Before we consider the one in the Berkshires," she said, "you're not returning to America without coming to France to see us, are you?"

He had carefully allotted every day of his time abroad, which did not include any visit to

Mervaux. But when the allotment was made he had not met the seventeenth cousins.

"You can be properly at home and watch Helen draw or me paint," she went on. "Helen musses about with charcoals and I with oils. You will see what life is like in the French country. Mother will write inviting you. Will you come?"

Her glance was cousinly and insistent. The glance did it. He decided that he would cut out Vienna and go to Mervaux for the second week in August of that year, 1914.

CHAPTER IV

TOO MUCH ANCESTOR

“**H**ELEN's temper again!” exclaimed Mrs. Sanford to her husband, after Helen's outburst.

“Sometimes I do not wonder that Helen has a temper,” said the vicar.

“But when a girl is as plain as she is, really it is the one thing she should avoid,” persisted his wife.

“Yes, I suppose it is bad policy, when Henriette has all the good looks and the money,” he replied.

Helen had now turned toward them and Phil and Henriette were going through the gateway. Mrs. Sanford drew a deep breath as one will who is about to undertake a duty and means to approach it softly.

“Did you give up your idea of becoming a nurse, Helen?” she asked casually.

It drew another flash from Helen's eyes, accompanied by a shudder of repugnance.

“I couldn't. I don't like the horror of it—seeing people cut up and everything! I knew I ought to and mother thinks I ought to; but I've

delayed because I—— Oh, I know what you're thinking!" She stopped and shook several rebellious strands of hair free with a sudden movement of her head.

Gentle Mrs. Sanford let her hands drop into her lap, lowering her head in the relief of one who has tried and failed.

"Sorry!" Helen's attitude had quite changed. She kissed her aunt on the cheek. "I have an awful temper, haven't I?" Her change of mood had been reflected by her irregular features with singular expressiveness. "I was going to arrange the flowers for the table for our seventeenth cousin and also—do you think cook would let me?—try my hand at the American shortcake thing. I learned how to cook from Jacqueline. I'd rather be a cook than a nurse, if worse comes to worse. Cooks get very good pay."

"Helen! Shocking!" exclaimed Mrs. Sanford. Many gentlewomen were nurses. "You'll have to bargain with cook about the shortcake," she added.

"Didn't his mother make it back in Massachusetts? Why not Helen of Mervaux, if not Helen of Troy, in Hampshire? Cry Harry, England and St. George! In the name of *Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité, allons!*"

She was off to the kitchen, whose monarch said, in language of her own, that the way to eat strawberries was with their stems on and dipping them

in sugar, or else as jam. In either case they had no relation to cake, and she was not taking cooking lessons from foreign countries.

"In other words, 'it's not done,' oh, England!" said Helen.

"Whatever you mean by that," began cook.

"It should be on British coats-of-arms instead of *Dieu et mon Droit*," Helen explained, without in the least explaining to cook. "I mean, I take the responsibility off your shoulders. If the American is poisoned I go to the gallows."

"Oh, very well!" agreed cook, as if convinced that a fatal result was inevitable but satisfied if her alibi were safely established.

Helen went to the task with a confident hand, while cook looked on with the same scorn that she would have regarded the introduction of *poi* or birds' nest soup into that loyal British household. Her task well under way, Helen returned to the garden to pick flowers for the table, the while humming French songs. She had finished with the flowers when Mrs. Sanford entered the dining-room to find her with her fingers outspread on the cloth, resting half her weight on them and looking at one of the family portraits on the wall.

"Still in love with your ancestor, Helen?" asked her aunt.

Helen was startled back from the seventeenth to the twentieth century.

"Yes. I'm coming in here after dark and

teach him to fall in love with me. He's the only man who ever will. Being three hundred years old he might take me because of my youth."

"My dear, where do you get all your strange ideas?"

"I wonder if he would like the strawberry shortcake thing?" Helen continued. "I'm sure he liked rum and took snuff and swore. And you'll please not to tell the seventeenth cousin that I made the cake. I take no risks."

The ring of her laugh remained in the room after she had returned to the kitchen. Helen was never more puzzling to her aunt than when she laughed; for then she was most French, and Mrs. Sanford ascribed much in Helen to Gallic inheritance.

"Poor dear!" thought her aunt. She was always thinking "Poor dear!" but she seldom gave voice to it—not in Helen's presence. It was the sure match to her temper. She would not bear to be "poor deared," as she called it, even by Henriette. Now Mrs. Sanford herself was regarding the portrait intently, and her husband entering joined her in its study.

"You see the likeness, too?" she asked, with a thrill of pride.

"The moment he alighted at the station. We'll seat him under it at dinner—a plot!" said the vicar, smiling, and he caught her hand in his in a way that would have been pleasant to an ob-

server. But if there had been an observer it would not have happened.

Voices were heard on the lawn and they looked out to see Phil and Henriette returning. His American accent which had sounded strange at first grew attractive to Mrs. Sanford. She herself showed him to his room to make sure that everything was right. The hot water "can," as he would have called it, was standing in the wash basin covered with a towel to retain the heat. His bag was unpacked and his toilet articles were laid out.

"The maids do that for you in England?" he said.

"Don't yours?" she inquired.

"Not Jane in a thousand years. She would regard me as a mollycoddle if I permitted it. Sometimes they do it in country houses which are as big as hotels on the hills outside Longfield."

"Strange!" she murmured.

"And I am to put my shoes, I mean my boots, outside the door at night?" he asked.

She was not quite certain of herself, being apprehensive of some American joke back of the question.

"Of course," she said.

"I'll try, though it is going to give my Puritan conscience a twinge," he said drily. "I'll try if you will not tell Jane when you come to visit

us in America. Whatever happens, I mean never to lose my standing with Jane."

She laughed without understanding why, except that she was liking this frank American cousin better and better. Indeed, the glow of a new emotion, sounding through years which had had their omnipresent sadness, had possessed her since she had looked at the portrait in the dining-room. The cheer of it was in her voice as she called outside Henriette's door to know if she needed anything; and then after she had passed Helen's door she remembered Helen and called to her also.

Henriette made a leisurely business of her toilet before the mirror. Why shouldn't she? It was merely a fit expression of sincere gratitude for nature's kindness. She might enjoy the grace of the movement of her fingers in caressing expertness around the face that she saw as she arranged her hair.

Helen came up from the kitchen with a blistered finger and her cheeks hot from the oven heat, saw that same face looking back at her. Often she had wished for some magic that would show a new one. Plain people, she thought, ought at least to have a change of plain faces for variety's sake. If others were as tired of her own as she was, she wondered how anybody on earth could look at it except as a punishment.

As long as she knew that her face was clean,

why should she pay any attention to it? She might have made more of her hair, which fell below her waist in abundant glory; but if she took pains with it she had that face in front of her during the process. So she ever gave her hair a hurried doing in order to escape enforced companionship with her features. To-night they insisted on a prolonged glance of attention. She made a grimace which was reflected back, and then she laughed at the reflection, making light of her self-consciousness, only to become more self-conscious and blushing, as if caught in a secret. For she saw that she was at her best when she laughed. Then her mobile features, including the lumpy nose, made harmony with the beaming mischief of her eyes and the gleam of her regular teeth.

"If I wore a mask over my nose and a perpetual grin I might be an advertisement for a dentist, at least!" she thought, only to purse out her lips in a "Poof!" as she turned away from the mirror. Then a sigh, whose prolongation apprised her of its existence and brought a shrug of disgust. The next impulse turned her to some charcoal drawings on the table—her own offspring. She loved them, punished them, disowned them at intervals. Now she took up one after the other, critically turning her head, wrinkling her brow, grumbling under her breath, and even sticking out her tongue in indecorous fashion at her own handiwork.

"I never can!" she cried. "I'm no good! Oh, cusses!"

So long was she preoccupied with the inspection, oblivious of seventeenth cousins and the strawberry shortcake thing, that she had to "jump" into her gown when the gong sounded, which was no new thing for her. It was not much of a gown. That being the case, why not jump into it? If it appeared to be thrown on it would be more harmonious with her style of beauty. What did it matter, anyway, when the harder you tried to draw the worse you drew?

The gown which Henriette wore was a good deal of a gown, as even the eye of the man who grasps effects (which are all that he is meant to grasp) and not the details which make the effects might see. Its simplicity, perhaps, made it as suitable for dinner at the vicarage as at a more pretentious board. Experts who charge more for their talents than for the material they use had fashioned it to make the most of Henriette, a delightful task because she supplied talent with such a good start. However, she was not satisfied with the gown after her inspection of it before the mirror, though possibly better pleased when she saw its effect on the seventeenth cousin.

Mrs. Sanford had seated Philip under the portrait across from Helen. When Henriette was seated at his side, the gown which had set off her figure so attractively as she entered the

room became only the vase from which rose the flower of her white shoulders and the white column of neck supporting the small head. She did not appear to direct the talk, yet it seemed only natural that she should be its creative spirit. Mostly it was between the two. The vicar and his wife were glad enough to listen and to exchange glance after glance at the portrait behind Phil's chair. Henriette frequently spoke of "we," which meant herself and Helen, as if they were inseparable; and if Helen spoke it was in answer to some reference which her sister made to her.

"I am the talker, you see," she said, "and Helen is the wise one."

"If I keep still," Helen interjected, "and let Henriette say that I'm wise, she is so convincing that lots of people think that I really am."

Phil was not the first traveller who hardly realised that he was having a meal at the same time that he sat next to a pretty girl at dinner. An exclamation from the others first apprised him that the strawberry shortcake thing had arrived. By all external criteria it might have come from the kitchen at Longfield. The main body was properly accompanied by a satellite bowl of crushed berries.

"You cut 't," said Helen to Phil.

He did as bidden.

"Now!"

He tasted it with judicial care.

"Amazing!" he declared. "Let no one say that England's insularity means lack of adaptability. Next to my mother's, it is the best I've ever eaten. I must give my compliments to the cook."

"I will for you," put in Helen.

"But the object is proselytisation," said Phil.

"I wait on the opinion of others."

The vicar took a mouthful and then another; his wife followed the same process; and—well, they both had second helpings. The strawberry shortcake thing had won no less a victory at Truckleford than had Virginia ham.

"It wasn't the taxation without representation on Virginia ham and shortcake that led to your Declaration of Independence, was it?" the vicar asked jocularly.

"No, that was tea," Phil replied. "Afterwards we became a nation of coffee drinkers, further to prove our independence."

"When you come to Mervaux," Henriette said, "Jacqueline will make you forest strawberry tartlets as only a French cook can and omelets so light that they have to be weighed down lest they fly out of the window when they are brought to table. We're all for art at Mervaux."

She again had the monopoly of his attention.

"Do you allow spectators?" he asked. "May I lie on the grass and watch you paint, or shall I

be required to pull up trees and rearrange the landscape? "

"It depends. I——" she murmured thoughtfully as she stirred her coffee.

Helen did not hear what they were saying. If they were preoccupied with each other, she was preoccupied with the portrait. The living face underneath the frame was in the same pose as its prototype. Phil's unconsciousness of what was so apparent to other eyes gave dramatic point to the situation. At last she could restrain herself no longer. She cut into Henriette's sentence with her outcry:

"Look! You must look!"

For him there was a sudden transition from a concentration of attention on Henriette to Helen's eyes, flaming with intensity, not lacking in mischief, as she leaned across the table.

"Where?" he asked.

"I didn't mean to shout as if there were an alarm of fire. Look at the portrait behind you!"

He turned and under the lettering of "General Thomas Sanford" he saw a clear-cut, positive face, lean, with a humorous curve to the mouth and eyes surveying the world with ready candour. When he turned back he was conscious of a silence and that all were watching him.

"Don't you see it?" asked Helen, speaking what was in the mind of the others.

"The portrait, yes. What has happened to

it?" he asked. He was a little wary of something lurking in the eyes of the plain girl opposite him. They seemed to have unexplored depths. If she were having some joke on him he would feel his way, this stranger in foreign climes, and leave the next move to her.

"Of course you don't," she said. "Wait! Everybody wait!" She was gone on the errand of her impulse.

"You never know quite what Helen is going to do next," Henriette explained.

"Her French blood," murmured Mrs. Sanford.

Helen returned bearing a mirror which she had taken from above her washstand.

"Of course you didn't see it. They say that if one met his double in the street he would be the last to recognise it," she told Phil, as she held the mirror at such an angle that both General Thomas Sanford's face and his own were reflected.

Phil drew back startled after a first glance, to look into Helen's eyes expressive of her intense enjoyment of the situation; and then irresistibly he looked again in the mirror. Two and a half centuries stood between the two Sanfords. Add thirty years to those of the man sitting at the table and dress him in the same garb as the man in the portrait and it would be difficult to tell them apart. Phil was not more thrilled than confused. And then another face appeared beside

his in the mirror. It was Henriette's, peeping in at the edge, her lips parted in a teasing smile.

"Very like, isn't it?" she said softly.

"Yes," he murmured to the reflection; and the reflection was gone, leaving him alone with that of the ancestor.

"The old blood!" exclaimed the vicar, with deep emotion. "His brother was the founder of the American family and your father and you and I are the only male descendants. Wait!" And he left the room.

"Which means that the plot thickens, I suppose," Phil remarked, with an accusing look at Helen.

"Honestly, I'm in the dark about his intentions," she said, still holding the mirror. The humour of the situation suddenly smote her, and she was laughing as she had into that same mirror before dinner. She noted a shade of surprise in his eyes, and realisation that the cause of it was his discovery that when she laughed she did have a certain charm that brought the blood to her cheeks. She had been caught posing—nothing less. The laugh died; not even a smile remained. The lump of nose, the irregular features, the broad mouth—she was her plain, usual self again.

"Go on laughing!" he exclaimed, unconsciously voicing his thought in his surprise. "I mean——" embarrassedly, "it's your joke. I

believe your conscience is already troubling you for the trick."

"It is a mirror conscience," she answered, looking back at him soberly; and then, from the infection of surprise in his eyes, a gathering, quizzical smile spread until it broke in another ripple of laughter.

"That is a new kind of conscience, Helen. Explain!" said her sister.

"To you, too, Henriette?" said Helen. "I've only just found it, myself."

"Apparently it is in the backs of mirrors," murmured Henriette.

"I don't blame Henriette for never looking at the back, do you?" Helen asked Phil.

Phil thought a little revenge was due him for having a mirror set in front of him for the purpose of a comparison of physiognomies.

"Hardly. I envy the mirror!" he said, turning to her. But she had dropped her gaze to her coffee cup and took a deliberate sip before looking up.

"It is always pleasant to say foolish things nicely," she remarked.

"But he is sincere. If he weren't it would be accusing him of blindness, wouldn't it, cousin?" put in Helen mischievously.

"Absolutely!" he managed to say, conscious that he was not having much revenge and that things were getting brittle; while Mrs. Sanford,

pretending to smile, could not quite follow the nimble conversation.

Helen laughed again to cover the misadventure of her unruly tongue, and Phil laughed, too, though he did not exactly know why. Henriette was taking another deliberate sip of coffee. They were not aware of the vicar's return until he stood behind Phil's chair.

"Look again, cousin!" Helen bade him.

He was of a mind not to, but could not control his curiosity. The vicar was holding against the frame beside the face of the ancestor a photograph of the statue in the square at Longfield.

"Your father sent it to me," he explained.

"Not a double, but a treble!" exclaimed Helen.

"It's the way of the blood," continued the vicar. "It skips generations, but it's always there—early in the seventeenth century, late in the eighteenth, and now early in the twentieth."

"But the one in the eighteenth was a wicked rebel, disloyal to our German king!" Helen put in again, yielding to temptation. "Old Thomas, there, would have disowned him."

"Helen!" admonished her aunt. "It was only a family quarrel."

"But I believe that old Thomas would have been on George Washington's right hand," said Helen. "He looks it."

Meanwhile, Phil was looking at the three faces,

so similar that he might well have been in doubt which was his own. If he were expected to rise and make a fitting speech it was beyond his sense of humour.

"Help! help! Too much ancestor!" he cried out; and half rising he seized Helen's hands, pushing the mirror away at the same time that he held her at arms' length. "You began it!"

She was flushing to the roots of her hair. How strong he was! How silly she had been!

"No, the ancestor! Ancestors begin everything for everybody!" she retorted. "And if you will let go of me I will put the mirror away."

"We all beg your pardon for embarrassing you. It was not a plot and we are all very interested," said the vicar, his eyes twinkling.

The photograph of the Revolutionary hero which her uncle laid on the table Helen took up; and the change of subject so earnestly desired by every one she wrought in another impulse.

"What do ancestors count," she said, "beside a piece of work like this! It's the best he ever did and there is not his equal in all this island—nowhere outside of France. It's power—the purity of line! Who wouldn't charge led by such a figure as that!"

"Now, Helen, when you are through with your ecstasy shan't we go out on the lawn?" said her uncle, patting her hand.

The force of her enthusiasm had something

compelling which led Phil to look at the photograph over her shoulder as if it were something he had never seen; but upon her uncle's hint he saw a plain, dull face yielding assent and he was conscious of a vitality suddenly turned limp.

Henriette took the photograph from her sister's hand.

"The best thing of his I have seen," she remarked, examining it. "Inspired by his subject. He has just missed the arm, I think. I should like to have a copy. Shall we walk?" she asked Phil, leading the way. "We ought to have a portrait of the seventeenth cousin as well as of the ancestors," she continued. "I may try portraiture again when you come to France. You will find it easier to pose than to tear up trees, for we have some very large trees at Mervaux, I warn you."

"I hope it will not be in profile," he replied.

Wasn't he going to France to see her? Perhaps she understood the intimation, as she pretended to study his face in the light of the doorway.

"I think a full face will be best!" she decided. "What a glorious night!"

Moonlight and the soft air of the English summer time redeem the soggy, rheumatic winters with their overcast days. A carpet of sod cut by the shadows of moon rays which gave lustre to her eyes! In months to come there were to be other

evenings equally fine by nature's gentle beneficence, but none like this. There never could be again; for something was coming to the world which would leave nothing in human relations the same.

The cousinly party walked up and down or stopped to chat in changing groups, Henriette and Phil mostly together and Helen sometimes quite by herself. The happiest of all were the vicar and his wife. They were old enough to take happiness in its full measure; to enjoy that of their own years and by reflection that of youth.

"Are you pleased with him?" asked Mrs. Sanford when two white heads, much like the two at their dinner three thousand miles away, rested on their pillows.

"Yes, my dear. I shall write to Dr. Sanford that we claim part of his son. He is our Philip, too."

"Our Philip!" she repeated. "The family does not die out," she said, in relief at some of the weight of an old burden lifted.

"It survives very worthily over the seas," said her husband.

"How beautiful Henriette was to-night. She grows more charming as she matures, though I confess young people of this age puzzle me. I couldn't help thinking what a splendid pair they made. Ah, blood will tell!"

"And Helen grows more temperamental."

"Poor dear! I don't know what will become of her."

With accustomed leisure Henriette had taken off her gown. It had served well that evening. To her delicate sense it was a living thing, a servant subject to praise and reproach. Caressingly she laid it aside. The buckles of her slippers smiled at her, and she held the foot which she withdrew arched and turned it for inspection before thrusting it into the softer slipper fitted to enjoy the bare intimacy of such a small foot. Still more leisurely she undid her hair and brushed it, conscious that the picture in the frame before her was the same that she had momentarily set in the mirror beside a seventeenth cousin's at table.

Helen—poor dear!—hung up her gown carefully enough, though with no more interest than if it were a towel; and she kicked first one of her slippers almost ceiling high and caught it and then the other, in enjoyment of an old trick of hers. Mirrors were of no use to her in undoing and brushing her hair; yet as she laid the brush back on the table she had a glimpse of herself and it was the smiling self. She laughed at that self, only to find that it was less plain-looking than the smiling self; and then she was angry. The mirror conscience stabbed her with the thought that she was posing, trying to be attractive.

"He must have fancied that I was flirting!" she mused. "I flirt with anybody!"

When she went to bed it was to toss and think of many things, consequent and inconsequent, and of no one thing for long, and when she found herself sobbing she turned on the light and took up her charcoals. But they seemed crude and self-accusing, and she turned to drawing pictures out of her fancy, which at last made her eyelids heavy as it had on many other occasions.

CHAPTER V

THE FLAVOUR OF GRAPES

WHEN Helen came down to breakfast she was wan and years older in appearance than Henriette, who was blooming and cheerful.

"Working again! Confess—I saw the light in your room," said Henriette. "You try too hard."

"There's no doubt of it," agreed Helen. "I can't help it. It's the fault of mistaking taste for talent in moments of impulse, and some kind of a knot in my brain."

"Poor dear!" said Mrs. Sanford in instinctive sympathy before she could catch herself. Then she drew back in her chair, prepared for the tempest.

But this time Helen did not appear even irritated; she had become more than ever inexplicable to her aunt.

"Poor dear!" she repeated absently. "If one talks about one's self one must expect to be talked about."

The vicar turned to Phil's experience in the Southwest. Was it really wild? And how did

one live? As Phil pictured his life in swift, broad strokes, Helen was listening intently and some of the fire returned to her eyes.

"There is one thing I have not told," he said gravely, as they went out on the lawn. "I think that it ought to be told even in the presence of the ancestor, though he may disown me."

"More American humour," thought Mrs. Sanford, convinced that she now knew the signals and prepared to laugh even if she did not understand the joke.

"My first task was cleaning out cattle cars!"

But Mrs. Sanford did not laugh. She was aghast. Even the vicar was visibly shocked. Helen spoke first.

"I hope you did it well," she said.

"No fear!" he rejoined.

"We wondered why you did not go to work for Peter," said the vicar.

They, too, knew of Peter Smithers. Even in England Philip could not escape the shadow of the rich man who might leave him a fortune, which Mrs. Sanford had already imagined as restoring the estate in Hampshire. Perhaps Phil guessed as much, for he related with relish the essence of his last interview with Peter. The vicar and his wife looked depressed; they longed to tell him that he had been unwise.

Helen was laughing as she had last night into the mirror, at the picture which she conjured

of Peter stamping down the path at Longfield in anger.

"Splendid!" she exclaimed, almost hilariously; and then was still, as their eyes met.

"You'll make your own fortune, which is better," said Henriette.

"A hundred a week is all there is in sight at present," Phil replied.

"We have little time before the train goes if——" the vicar urged.

It was the ancestors again. The warrior of the portrait had the cool and damp distinction of having his bones under a stone in the church floor which had been trod by generations of worshippers. Later cousins were in the churchyard, their chiselled names grown faint. The vicar's kindly face glowed as he indulged in his favourite topic of genealogy. Helen imagined the ancestors in the garbs and prejudices of their time come to life and passing in review before the transplanted and surviving branch.

"I suppose," she suggested, in the way she had of speaking aloud to herself, as if the thought were not worth considering by other people but pleased her, "I suppose that Peter Smithers would say that these are all dead ones and it's the live ones that count."

Of course she should not make such remarks. Still, she would and people would stare at her in wonder, even as the vicar and his wife were star-

ing at that moment. Phil looking hard at a tombstone had a quiver to his lips which he would have denied bore any relation to a smile.

"I was only thinking how much nicer it must be to be alive and touring Europe for the first time with the money you had earned, instead of being an ancestor," she explained. "I like Peter for giving his money to the clubhouse. Ancestors did nothing for him."

"You don't seem to care for ancestors?" Phil suggested.

"Oh, yes, lots—generically," she answered. "They built cathedrals and churches like this and had a horrid good old human time in the doing of it. As for one's own ancestors, it depends upon how much they have done for you."

"You are quite surpassing yourself at iconoclasm to-day," said her sister gently and sympathetically.

Helen nodded as if she knew it, and could not help herself.

"Everything depends upon the flavour of the grapes," she replied. The sisters were searching each other's eyes in a new and surprising way to both. The grapes were sweet to Henriette; they were sour to Helen.

"It is the hard work last night," said Henriette, slipping her arm around her sister. "Those charcoals may come right yet."

Helen was silent, unresisting, unresponsive, her

face like ill-moulded clay, and Henriette a personification of apology to Phil.

"According to story-books, Peter may yet fall on his knees and beg you to take his fortune," she added to Phil. "So much for Peter Smithers. He doesn't worry you, does he? It's delightful having seventeenth cousins like you."

"And like you!" he replied to the challenge. "And you will not let me miss the train."

They had time to walk and his bag had already gone. Helen was subdued, remaining with her uncle behind Phil and Henriette.

"Remember at Mervaux, the sixth of August!" Henriette called from the platform.

"I await your mother's invitation," Phil replied.

His last view of her was the uplifted arm as she waved her handkerchief. Of course he had said that he would return to Truckleford now that he had found the way and the vicar even talked of accepting the invitation to Longfield, which is the way of such partings. But America is far away.

Philip was alone in the compartment, very much alone as pictures recollected from the down journey passed before his mind. The glance across the aisle at the first meeting; Henriette's face reflected in the mirror beside his; her figure preceding him along the path as they ascended the hill above the village; little confidences on the walk

to the station. These are well-known symptoms. Acting as his own diagnostician, this modern youth only four weeks from the cactus country thought:

"I wonder if I have been hit! And Helen? I don't quite make her out. She's not uninteresting, though. I wonder how long it will take Henriette to do a portrait! I hope she is one of those painstaking artists who has intervals of rest and conversation. But maybe Madame Ribot won't write to me," scepticism which he dismissed as unpleasant. It stood to reason that the mother of such a girl as Henriette would do anything that she wanted. "I should, myself," he decided.

To him as an American the assassination of the heir to a European throne and his consort, which he read in the newspapers that evening, had the thrill of horror of a railroad or a steamship disaster. It could have none of the seriousness that it had to every European, who had that "balance of power," as they called it, in the back of the head of his individual existence. He read; he sympathised in a generic twinge of pity, and was little further concerned. In the afternoon of the next day he should be in Holland and in the evening, had he not chosen to spend a few days with Rembrandt and wooden shoes, he could have been in Berlin, a journey in distance equivalent to that from Buffalo to New York or Chicago to Omaha.

What contrast in language and people! Miss

Wooden Shoes was as boyhood pictures made her : and leisurely England, too ; but where was the phlegmatic old German with his china-bowl pipe ? He realised the energy of the new Germany, galvanised by some higher will of leadership, with the resentment of its *verboten* system which is inevitable to all Americans who have not been educated in Germany and themselves fallen into step, and particularly to a Sanford of New England.

He met Americans wherever he went, in hotels, on trains, and in picture galleries, catered to for the dollars they dropped by the way into open palms, privately criticised for the very liberality which made them welcome, not to mention also for their brusqueness, their air of success and sometimes their spread-eagleism. But they did not care as long as they had the freedom of the playground. European politics or world politics did not concern them, come from the fatness of their new world beyond the seas. The last tourist summer of its kind !

Philip studied the newspapers with the help of college German which is good enough on grammar but floundering in passing the time of day. His keen mind began to catch the sense of how an assassination affected that balance of power ; he felt the pressure in the air before a cloud burst ; the suspense of the sparks running along the fuse from Sarajevo to the powder magazines—but all

objectively, with no presage of how subjective it was to become to him.

Then one day all the youth of that nation moved as with one thought and purpose, as the football eleven goes onto the gridiron—which was the simple comparison that he made. For forty years they had been drilling for this struggle and all the years and days and hours of the forty years broke in cumulative force for the blow. How it made him think; that a people could act together in this fashion; that a million and two million men could go each to his place as the fireman to his on an alarm! It seemed as if they should sweep all the world before them, like the breaking of a dam down a river bed.

Youth was not bothering how to get home. It was on the scene and that was enough. But about Mervaux and seventeenth cousins? Should he see either? While in Berlin he had received so insistent a letter of invitation from Madame Ribot that he had decided to spend less time in Paris and more in Mervaux than originally planned, if it were agreeable.

Somehow he got on board a train in Switzerland, and sitting up all night in a stifling second-class compartment he reached Paris. His fellow-passengers were thinking of how to obtain money on letters of credit and how to find berths on a transatlantic steamer. His own passage had already been engaged on a French ship from Havre.

In Paris was a man who was more important to Phil than kings and generals. The manager of the corporation which had promoted him and paid the wage that gave him the holiday had just arrived from Vichy by automobile. Mr. Ledyard was in a state of mind! The credit of the world thrown out of gear; no answers to his cablegrams; stock markets closed, while the passage he had engaged from Boulogne on a German steamer was of about as much use to him for crossing the Atlantic as a team of Esquimaux dogs. When Phil entered the room Ledyard had been ringing in vain for a servant, who was already with the colours. He was glad of some one to talk to, this man of power whom Phil had met only twice: once on being employed and again on his return from the Southwest to promotion.

"Business will go to the devil!" said Ledyard. "Everybody is going to draw in and wait to see whether or not the world is coming to an end. I'd like to drive the Kaiser's war bonnet down over his head and strangle him. I confess that I never felt so helpless in my life. I can't even get a second-class passage. Steamship company paid no attention to my wires. First come, first served."

"I have a passage on a French liner for the sixteenth," said Phil, "two in the cabin, if it will be any use to you, sir."

"Will it be any use? Taken, if it's six in the

cabin," said Mr. Ledyard. "And you return when you can get a comfortable passage; your salary goes on." He considered the favour worth Phil's salary for years. "I shouldn't stay in Paris if I were you," he went on. "You might be caught in a siege. These people can't hold the Germans. Manufacturing power and efficiency will be the big factors in this war, and the Germans are ready. You have seen that, haven't you?"

"Yes. Amazing—it's a lesson."

"My English friends won't see Germany; they live too close to her. But an American ought to, even if he resents her. It's between the Germans and the British navy. The French can't stand up to it. I only wish they could."

Phil could not agree. It was a different atmosphere which he had found in Paris from that in Berlin, but no less impressive. Here was the wall to hold the battering-ram which he had seen in movement for the shock on the other side of the frontier. The emotional French were going silently to their places no less promptly than the Germans; democracy against Kaiserdom, the closed shops with "*Sous le drapeau*" chalked on the shutters, the quietness of prayer and resolution which possessed all France as one human being had taken possession of him.

All the world at war, and he was walking down the Champs-Élysées, the greatest street in the

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world. its pavement white in the moonlight and silent except for an occasional footfall. Somewhere over the hills in the direction of Rheims was Mervaux. If the Ribots were still there and wanted him, he would pay them at least a call.

CHAPTER VI

AT MERVAUX

THE trace of American blood in Madame Ribot's veins was only an echo, yet its presence kept her from being entirely European. She had never visited America; even her English had more than a touch of French accent. America was vast, distant, noisy, and little concerned her. Nothing much concerned her except her comfort. Her small, shrewd eyes served the ends of a sluggish disposition. In girlhood they had not kept her from being beautiful and in middle age they sat guardian over her health and the business of preserving the freshness of features which were strikingly like Henriette's.

Her phlegm, if phlegm it were, was reaction from days when she had enjoyed Monte Carlo no less than Paris. They were days that she never mentioned. Possibly they had brought prematurely the wrinkles which, in a later phase, she massaged as unpleasant landmarks. She fought to retain youth, while reliving it in Henriette.

M. Ribot, who was in the Argentine, belonged

to the past, and the income dating back to an arrangement between lawyers came regularly from a lawyer and would come till her death or till she married again. There had been a grandfather who lived in a villa overlooking the Mediterranean. He had been fond of Henriette and said that his son, Henriette's father, was a fool and a blackguard and his daughter-in-law was a lucky, selfish, spoiled child. When he died he left Henriette an independent fortune.

The rest was wrapped in mystery and eccentricity, with Helen a sort of appendage. She and Henriette indistinctly remembered a quarrel between their parents in an apartment in Paris, which they overheard from an adjoining room without knowing what it meant. Later, the grandfather came and the father went away, without Madame seeming to mind his going. Helen did remember her mother saying to the father:

"You may have Helen, if you wish, but I shall keep Henriette;" and the grandfather added: "Yes, she stays in France. I shall stay in France, myself."

As the father would not have plain little Helen, the mother kept her. After her separation from her husband, Madame Ribot settled in the chateau at Mervaux and Henriette's money maintained a small apartment in Paris, where the family went in winter that Henriette might study painting; for all agreed that she had talent.

Helen wandered in the fields and talked to the peasants and kept on trying to draw. Her only lessons were from an old artist who had become interested in her when she was fifteen. His technique was excellent. He knew how, but he could not do it, as he said.

"You keep on drawing and drawing," were his last words, "and don't bother if any one thinks you an ugly duckling."

She did not mind the old artist calling her an ugly duckling. These two believed in the truth, the truth of art. No one had ever seen so much of the charm of her smile as he when they walked beside the Seine, went to the Louvre, browsed in old print shops, and he criticised her work, her miserable charcoals, as she called them. When he died Helen felt that she had lost her best friend and she went regularly to put flowers on his grave, smiling the while, even if her eyes were moist, as he who had no friends except her would have wished.

Her smiles were for the byways. She had many for the peasants and the villagers. They liked the strange, moody Helen better than the beautiful, gracious Henriette, and they liked to pose for her. Mère Perigord who sat outside her door crocheting on sunny days had been drawn a score of times by Helen.

"Keep on drawing and drawing!" This was really all of Helen's life. Henriette painted and

Madame Ribot massaged her wrinkles, read many novels, took a long time to dress for dinner, a longer time to get up in the morning, and exchanged reminiscent letters with men and women who had belonged to the early period of her life. One might think that she was preparing to marry again, but the peasants and the servants knew better. They had dismissed the gossip over the thought in connection with the Count de la Grange, a neighbour of acceptable age but quite poor, and also in connection with General Rousseau, a major in the war of '70, another neighbour who was fairly well-to-do.

For years the thing had been going on. Almost every day the Count and the General called on her and came to dinner. Madame Ribot was their social world. They were ever telling her how young she kept; the Count with an indirection which was the most delicate flattery and the General with the brusqueness of a soldier, which had the charm of contrast with the Count's method. The two vying in gallantries of an old-fashioned kind made a situation all to Madame Ribot's taste, as her shrewd eyes turned from one to the other. Imagination and recollection, with the basis of the past to work on, completed her satisfaction.

When she received the letter from Henriette asking her to invite the seventeenth cousin to Mervaux, her characteristic of making much of little by reflection, which was as French as it

was innate, enlarged it to a significant event. Thanks to the vicar of Truckleford, she was not uninformed of the statue in the square at Longfield; and she was not without pride in her blood. Her American mother had not been of the *nouveaux*, and from what Henriette said about Phil she grasped that he was of that breed of American sufficient unto itself, in the pride of a new nationality which does not need the label of nobility as assurance of quality. She could write a gracious letter and it pleased her to take some pains with the invitation to Philip Sanford.

The letter posted, she had a twinge of loneliness. She missed Henriette. Her affection for her daughter was compounded with selfishness. She liked the sight of Henriette at her easel; Henriette in her morning gown; Henriette in dishabille, throat and shoulders bare and her figure worthy of her features. Thus she herself had looked in youth, she knew. If she had only had Henriette's eyes! She was pleased that her daughter had fine eyes, yet almost envied them. Still, Henriette was a part of herself; a flower from her stem; a pleasant reminder of youth which kept her young. As an inheritance Henriette had her mother's gift with men, plus her own gift of art; for it was art that made her different from her mother.

Henriette's letter from Truckleford had made no mention of the thing that Madame Ribot had

had most in mind as the object of the girls' visit to the Sanfords. Helen, who had written only once and at other times sent love through Henriette, had not mentioned it, which was more suspicious still. So Madame Ribot wrote directly to Mrs. Sanford, who answered that "Helen was in such a temper at mention of the subject that I did not pursue it."

"The little devil!" exclaimed Madame Ribot.

It was not the first time that she had made such reference to Helen. In the fulness of irritation she started a letter to Helen, peremptory, upbraiding; but did not finish it. The recollection of three days which she had once spent nursing her husband in a hotel room, when they were travelling in Algeria where no nurse could be obtained, rose before her. Besides, anger was wrinkle-making. And what was the use? She tore up the letter and turned from her desk to her manicure set.

Her plan had been for Helen to remain in England and enter a training school for nurses. England was a better place for that sort of thing than France and it meant that Helen would be established quite independently some distance from home and earning her living in an honourable way. Not that she had put the plan as clearly as this to Helen, but she had written it to Mrs. Sanford, trusting to that gentle soul's persuasion to carry it into effect.

"If Helen only had a little grit!" thought Madame Ribot. "Now if it were Henriette——"

Awaiting the girls' return, on the mantelpiece of the dining-room, with a number of letters for Henriette was a letter from Paris for Helen. When she opened it she forgot any twinge of suffering because her mother had kissed Henriette on both cheeks and embraced her, while giving the other daughter a dab on one cheek. Helen was breathing very hard and holding the letter so tight in her fingers that it trembled. She had read it through twice to make quite certain that her eyes were not deceiving her, before her cry of delight made Madame Ribot and Henriette, who was running through her own letters to see which she should open first, turn.

"Oh, it is good—good—good!" she repeated. "M. Vaillant is coming to look at my charcoals to see if I have enough for an exhibition. If I have that means I shall make a lot. You're bound to, everybody says, at one of his exhibitions."

Neither Madame Ribot nor Henriette had spoken. They seemed startled by the violence of her enthusiasm.

"Aren't you glad?" Helen asked, suddenly becoming very still.

"Glad! Who should be glad if not I?" said her mother feelingly.

Henriette slipped her arm around Helen's waist.

"And I, you dear mouse, when you've worked so long and hard! It's a triumph," she said.

Helen nestled her head on her sister's shoulder and drew deep, long breaths, while Madame Ribot took up the letter.

"I don't want you to be too set-up for fear you may be disappointed," she said. "M. Vailiant says *if* there are enough to be worth while. He is only coming to look over your work."

"Yes—yes," said Helen, sobering. "I had the exhibition already open. Enough and worth while! We'll see—you will help me to decide. I'll bring them all down and we can go through them together. From the way he writes he may come to-day."

She hurried away and returned directly with the first portfolio of the drawings which she had kept—for she had destroyed many in moments of depression—and having laid them on the table went for another and still another.

"I never realised that I had done so many!" she exclaimed, in amazement at the size of the stack.

"Mère Perigord twenty times!" smiled Henriette.

Madame Ribot was appalled by the task, though she had seen and heard so much of Helen's charcoals. She and Henriette stood by perfunctorily, while Helen turned severe critic. None of them seemed good to her, as she thought of how they

would look on a wall at an exhibition, with connoisseurs picking them to pieces.

"Oh, cusses! I can't do it! I never can!" she declared. "My fate is to wear a white cap and feed people broth and keep their temperature chart in order!" She slapped one Mère Périgord in the face in disgust.

"Remember," said Henriette, "that charcoal is very limited."

In the midst of the selection a limousine rolled up to the door and a roly-poly little man, with close-cropped beard and eyes as shrewd as Madame Ribot's own, alighted and sent in the card of "M. Vaillant, Art Dealer."

Madame Ribot received him. As he entered the room Henriette was standing by the near side of the table in front of Helen, in whose heart was great fear, any faith she might have had in her charcoals shrivelling in his presence. M. Vaillant bowed to both, his glance swiftly moving about the room as if counting the number of the scattered drawings; but to Henriette, whose beauty dominated her surroundings, he made a particularly low bow.

"Mademoiselle, I see that you are ready for me," he said, with still another bow to Henriette. And Helen felt the shrivelling sensation more deeply.

"Both my daughters are artists, and one paints," said Madame Ribot, with the reflection

of pride in the tribute which M. Vaillant had instinctively paid to Henriette, some of whose paintings were on the walls. Indeed, they were everywhere about the chateau. "I am rather fond of this one, myself," she added, nodding toward a landscape which faced the dealer. It had had honourable mention at the Salon, but it had not sold.

Looking from Henriette to the picture and then back at Henriette, the art dealer breathed an "Ah!" in a way that implied that a place in the Salon was the obvious one for Henriette.

"Naturally, I know of your work," he said, with another bow.

"My daughter has never had an exhibition, though she has quite enough pictures now," went on Madame Ribot. "There are others in the next room. Perhaps you would like to see them, too."

Most charming Madame Ribot was when she was interested in any purpose, and she led the way into the room, Henriette meantime standing in the doorway and studying M. Valliant's face. Helen remained beside her pile of charcoals, trying to resist the desire to fly to the fields away from the whole business. She could feel her heart pounding and her temples throbbing. When she had a glimpse of herself in the mirror over the mantelpiece she realised that it was from herself that she particularly wanted to escape.

"Excellent technique," M. Vaillant remarked. "But an exhibition of paintings—that is a great undertaking. One of the big houses will take you up one day and make your vogue. There is no hurry."

"It was mother who was speaking of the exhibition, not I," said Henriette casually. "You came to see my sister's charcoals."

"So I did," agreed the dealer. "Charcoals are more in keeping with the modest pretensions of my establishment. Quick returns and small profits, as they say at the Bon Marché."

"You will stretch a point for her, won't you?" said Henriette, as she drew aside to allow him to return to the other room. "She's worked so hard and it means so much to her."

But Helen had overheard. A dash of red shot into her cheeks, as her shoulders gave a nervous shrug. The dealer looked from the beautiful to the plain girl with that sense of contrast between the two which Helen had felt a thousand times.

"Where do I begin?" he asked, almost perfunctorily.

Some one had told Helen that one should blow one's own trumpet to an art dealer; that many an artist had been started on a career by making the most of his personality. But when she was conscious of how poor her drawings were she could not play the herald of her own skill. As for

personality, one must have something to start with.

"Those four I picked out for the least bad," she said, handing them to him.

Not a sign on the dealer's face, as he looked them through, while her temples throbbed.

"More academic than the one I had seen—better drawing, but——" he shook his head.

The throbbing ceased. Helen knew the truth. There would be no exhibition. She felt faint; there was no heart left in her.

"And these?" asked M. Vaillant, looking at a time-coloured board on top of a pile on a chair.

"Discarded. They were too awful—some of them just dashed off for fun."

"Oh!"

M. Vaillant spread his legs as he bent over the pile; he puffed out his lips and sucked them in, his only sign of emotion, as he began separating the drawings into two piles. Then he applied the same process to those on the table, without question or comment. Helen did not know what to make of him. She was dizzy with curiosity and hope. When he was through, still silent like some general over a war-map, this master of artistic fate, who knew that the real master was the public who paid his rent, made a single pile of those which he had chosen.

"And these?" He found he had missed some against the wall behind a portière.

"Oh, cartoons I call them—not a bit worth while!" said Helen. "Caricatures, perhaps. I just did them for the sport of it."

M. Vaillant did not seem to hear her. He went through the cartoons twice, still keeping up that motion of his lips as if he were alternately blowing soap bubbles and sucking in a string.

"Have you ever tried etching?" he asked.

"No. I'd like it, but—I——" gasped Helen.

"I would if I were you," he said, so very matter-of-factly that she was puzzled. "Ever tried painting?"

"I—yes——" she faltered. His shrewd eyes were looking at her sharply.

"Have you anything that you've done?"

"Yes, but it's awful—just splotches of colour. I see colour that way. Shall I get it?" she asked.

"Why not? Let's see the whole shop while we are at it."

Helen ran upstairs, wondering if he were making fun of her. Not one word of praise had he spoken. He had given no sign of enthusiasm. Yet he had asked her if she had ever tried etching and wanted to see this painting which she drew from under a pile of clothes on the cupboard shelf. Well, if the great art dealer had come from Paris to see the whole shop, then he should see it. Let him be amused. She did not care. He could not hurt her feelings; he should not see that she minded when he told her the worst.

"Helen's painting is only for fun," Henriette was explaining to M. Vailliant as they waited for Helen's return. "Please don't be too critical. She is very sensitive."

"Oh, no. I realise that she is not a serious painter like you, Mademoiselle. I thought I should like to see what ideas of colour she had. Why not?" M. Vailliant mused, as he picked out two from the pile of charcoals on the table and laid them on top in a sort of bored, add-six-and-multiply-by-four manner.

When Helen returned with her painting, a little thing of a wet shepherd and his dog in a burst of soft, apologetic sunlight through the mist, he took it from her with a casual nod and having set it on the mantelpiece stepped slowly backward and resumed his lip-movements, which he interrupted long enough to ask Helen if she had had any lessons in painting.

"I've only watched Henriette and taken some of her colours and splotched, as I call it," she replied almost defiantly.

But he only muttered, "Impressionistic!" between his puffs and suckings.

"Yes, that is what I should say!" put in Henriette.

"I know it!" exclaimed Helen, with an abruptness that startled him out of his mannerism into an intense glance at her. She was laughing, her chin up, the regular teeth showing in a white



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line. If ever eyes had invited any critic to shoot his sharpest darts they were hers. "And the exhibition?" she demanded. "Shall we hold it in the Salon itself or at the Louvre?"

M. Vaillant opened his mouth as if he were about to say something emotional; then rubbed his chin and stepped to one side to have another look at the painting.

"Of course I don't think it is as good as Millet—not quite," Helen proceeded, forcing her measure a trifle. "Isn't it wonderful to find a genius at Mervaux so unexpected——" She broke off her satire helplessly.

"Quite!" said M. Vaillant, looking at her and rubbing his chin again. "I'll put the painting on the back wall to lighten up the gallery—good contrast, line and colour," he went on. "This is the lot I have chosen for the exhibition," he said, indicating the pile on the table.

"You mean it! You mean it!"

But the smile on M. Vaillant's face told her without words that he did; and reaching across the table, in her quick impulse, she took his hands in hers. He felt their pressure tighten so that his soft palms were almost doubled over as, unheeding her mother's exclamation at the action, she demanded:

"Do you think that I ought to go and learn to be a nurse, or can I make my living drawing these things?" And as suddenly as she had seized

his hands she drew away and spread out hers in an appeal: "Honest! No nice little phrases, but honest!"

"Nursing!" exclaimed the dealer, lifting his hands with outstretched fingers, horror written on his face. "Giving sick people medicine and adjusting bandages! You, my girl! No! Who ever suggested it?"

She seemed to draw nearer, though she stood motionless, such was the intensity of her inquiry.

"A living, I mean! I must decide! I can't stand it any longer!"

M. Vaillant rubbed his chin again and became the business man.

"I'm willing to give you the chance," he said. "We'll hold the exhibition—provided there isn't war. War! That's the end of everything—no art sold then. And the news is bad, very bad to-day. Yes, I'll give the exhibition if you will agree to terms. Talking business and no nonsense, now."

The terms were that he should have the disposal of all her work for three years on the regular commission basis. Helen agreed in a voice that sounded hollow in her own ears.

"If there were not a prospect of war——" He looked again at the painting. "Well, even if there is going to be war I'll buy these two top drawings and the painting for a thousand francs. Check now. Do you agree?"

Then M. Vaillant permitted himself to smile without rubbing his chin; and he kept on smiling as he wrapped up the painting and the charcoals.

"I think we'll make them go," he said. "If there isn't war I'll come down and get the others for the show and we'll have a talk together, young woman, about the future. If there is war"—he gave his shoulders a Gallic shrug. "I go to join the colours. Who knows? There is only France, then."

Leaving behind a contract and a check and a young woman still and wide-eyed, he rode away. Not until he was out of the grounds did he permit himself a long-drawn breath of satisfaction, as he leaned back on the cushions and lighted a cigarette, this cold trader in art.

"My emotion got away from me again!" he said. "I'll never be a real dealer if I can't control it. Why, if you discovered a Rembrandt you oughtn't to let on! It didn't matter with that girl, though. Nice chateau. Mother seemed well-to-do, but how eager the girl was for the thousand francs! One never knows. Probably oughtn't to have mentioned etching. Better for her to stick to charcoals and make a vogue. My enthusiasm again! Splotches of colour, as she says—not enough. But I think there is more to come. As for the other's painting—faint stuff, without soul; teacher-taught-me stuff—pouf! But if Mlle. Helen only had her sister's beauty I'd

have a dry point of her for the exhibition, introduce her about—surely would be a go. But no beautiful woman can ever paint. Everybody admires her so much as a subjective work of art that she can never improve in her objective art. Why should she? One good thing that Mlle. Helen is so plain—no danger of her ever marrying. She's suffered, that's it—that's the quality you must have! And the likeness in voice between those two girls, except when she was laughing or became emotional. Then she was rather attractive. The fire in her, her talent, shone out of her eyes and made you forget how plain she is. She wouldn't be so plain, either, if it weren't for the nose. Some enemy wished that nose on her! Well, I made her happy. Think of that, you hard-headed Parisian, you brought triumph for that girl!"

Triumph was not the word to describe Helen's feelings after M. Vaillant's departure, as in the reaction of exhaustion, which required that she dab the moisture out of her eyes, she leaned against the wall. Relief, joy, gratitude! Through a mist she saw her mother and Henriette looking at her, their strange, puzzled expression not defined. She grasped only the fact of them and their nearness. All rancour had passed out of her heart. Her vitality surging back, she put her arms impetuously around her mother's neck and kissed her.

"Don't choke me!" gasped Madame Ribot.

"I didn't mean to! But I shall you, Henriette!" and she embraced her sister, in turn.

"I should say you would!" gasped Henriette.

"I'm afraid that repose is foreign to your nature," said her mother.

"It must be," returned Helen, as she released Henriette. "Oh, I've been ugly to you sometimes, because I couldn't help drawing and knew I ought to, but I'll never be again! It's all too good. I want to be alone with it!"

Emancipation was the real word. She went forth into the open air, freed from the cage, to test her wings. More strands of hair loosing as she raced along, she struck the fields and through the village, calling out to all the people she knew, but not stopping to talk, and on up to a hilltop, where the plotted glory of the farmlands lay before her, with the fields of grain waving gold.

A thousand francs! was her mundane thought. She could live on that a long time in Paris, drawing and studying. It did not matter how plain she was. She might have a nose as big as a prize potato and yellow eyes and rat teeth. People were not going to look at her, but at her pictures. Her face need never hurt her again. She did not know that she had a face when she was drawing. She was young, with the long span of years stretching straight before her—straight,

straight, like the great main roads of France! It was all clear—unless war came. But it could not come. It was too hideous a thought. The world was too beautiful to be drenched with blood; too wise to be so foolish.

Returning homeward she thought of many things; even of that seventeenth cousin and how she would like to do a charcoal of him. She would, while Henriette painted him. With no idea of the time that had elapsed, dust-covered, a rent in her gown from a thorn-bush, she burst in on her mother and sister, who were halfway through dinner.

"You are a sight!" said Madame Ribot. "Do change before you sit down!"

Upstairs in her room she looked into her mirror with a new sense of defiance.

"Oh, you are plain, but do you think that matters?" She held her hands up in front of her face. "Five fingers like everybody else and they can hold a crayon or a brush! Silly!" She laughed again and the mirror laughed back in the glorious secret of—triumph was the word, this time.

"M. Valliant must really think highly of your charcoals," said Henriette at table, "or he wouldn't have taken the painting."

"Yes, that was very surprising," said Madame Ribot.

"But remember I got the thousand francs!

Isn't that the proof of the pudding from an art dealer. I'll set up a studio in Paris, a tiny one in a garret, and get my own meals—thrifty me! And I'll be away from home, mother, as much as if I were nursing—I mean, I'll be independent, as I ought to be."

She went on talking about her plans, unconscious that Henriette and even her mother were slightly inattentive.

CHAPTER VII

A FULL-FACE PORTRAIT

BUT the war did come. It came, perhaps, to teach the foolish people of a beautiful world how beautiful it was and how foolish they were.

Helen did not have to wait on the note from M. Vaillant to know that there would be no exhibition. The war had killed her little ambition, along with millions of others. Widespread human tragedy enveloped the personal thought. Some other person in some other age seemed to have done those charcoals, which still lay stacked on the corner table in the sitting-room. Her thoughts went forth with the able-bodied villagers who had left their harvests to fight for France. Their going was, as yet, Mervaux's only direct contact with the war. The sky remained the same; the sunshine was equally glorious; the shade equally pleasant at mid-day; and Jacqueline was making equally good omelets.

What were the Ribots to do? The girls thought that they ought to try to help France. Everybody ought when France was about to fight

for her life. But Madame Ribot decided to the contrary. She was irritated with the war and she meant that it should trouble her as little as possible.

"But not to be in Paris in a time like this!" protested Henriette.

"How lucky to be out of Paris!" said Madame Ribot. "All the trains full of soldiers, and there will be trouble about passes, General Rousseau says."

She placed great reliance on the General. He said that there was no danger. This time the tables would be turned on the Prussians. She, too, believed in a French victory. It was not as it had been in '70. The French were ready. Where could the war disturb her as little as at Mervaux, in the lap of the hills a mile away from the main road?

"Then I'll go, mother," said Helen. The objections to Henriette's going to Paris could not apply to her.

"No, we shall all stay here," Madame Ribot replied.

"But I have my thousand francs," said Helen. "I'll run up for only two or three days."

"No. You would not go when I thought it best," said Madame Ribot pettishly. "Now when I need you, you want to go. You were always very contrary."

"Oh—I—forgive me! I did not know that

you thought of it in that way—that you needed me.”

“We must all be together. I should worry about you.”

“Of course you would! I didn’t think of that. Oh, mother!”

It was something new in her mother’s voice which sent her across the room to put her arm around her mother’s neck and press her own cheek against hers. Helen had been hungry for affection all her life, plain girls being quite human and wanting what they do not receive. In answer she had a pressure of her hand which was real, and she kissed her mother again and again on the cheek. Perhaps her mother had always loved her, but had not shown it.

Madame Ribot felt the tight grip of her daughter’s hand with a sense of reassurance. There was something strong about Helen. She would be dependable in a crisis.

“If we stay here together and don’t trouble the war, probably the war will not trouble us,” Madame Ribot continued. It was the maxim expressive of her temperament.

“Oh! I hadn’t thought of it in that way!” Helen gasped.

“Besides, if you went to Paris and got into trouble I should have to come up and get you out.” She was weary of having her daughter’s arm around her neck and feeling that

strange resentment against the world which she always suffered after looking long at Helen's features.

Helen drew away, her peculiar sensitiveness conscious of the old barrier.

Life for the next few days continued much as usual at the chateau, so far as Madame Ribot and Henriette were concerned. Henriette went on painting. But Helen could not draw. She wandered over the fields, her mind ever on the war. She was with the Belgians at Liège; with the French in Alsace. All three wondered, as the time approached, if the seventeenth cousin would come to Mervaux.

"Hardly," said Henriette.

"But I think he will," said Helen.

"Why should he? It's war time."

"Yes, why?" repeated Helen, with a searching look at Henriette, who lowered her eyes in a way that her sister well understood. Many young men had come to Mervaux for the same reason. Many had gone away trying to conceal their dejection. Henriette had enjoyed the visits, but not more than Madame Ribot who, looking on, lived over her own successes.

"Henriette does not know yet what it means to fall in love," thought her mother. "I hope that she will not for a few years more. A woman may do that only once. And Helen had not fallen in love, either. Poor Helen!" At

intervals she could be sorry for herself by being sorry for Helen.

It was no surprise to her that the war did not keep the seventeenth cousin away from Mervaux or that his note was addressed to Henriette. As the mails were now so irregular, he wrote, he would not wait for a reply, but would arrive on the morning of the day set, and should he find that the war interfered with their arrangements he could return to Paris in the afternoon. Helen rather waited to hear that he had included his regards to her, but Henriette made no mention of it.

Phil had had a glimpse of an English home and now he was to have one of a home in France, an intimacy which seldom falls to the lot of the tourist. Smiling as she knew how, a hostess with the charm of French manner, Madame Ribot received him, taking in, without seeming to do so, every detail, from the state of his nails to the cut of his clothes. Her judgment of people was that of appearance and manner and position. There were Americans who were nice and who were not nice and Englishmen and Frenchmen who were nice and who were not nice. She would have preferred a nice villain to an ill-mannered saint. For she had decided when quite young that it was not worth while wasting one's time with anybody who was not nice. At the same time, she insisted that she was not a snob and the great

appeal to her of the French was their democracy. What she really liked about the French was their politeness, their cooking, their novels and their art of living. She decided that Phil was one of the nice Americans, though she had foreseen that he must be or Henriette would not have wanted to invite him to Mervaux. Helen never invited anybody. When quite young she had failed to distinguish between the nice and the unnice people.

The morning train from Paris to Mervaux had been taken off and the afternoon train was late. Henriette had met Phil at the station and Helen was away from the house when they arrived. After his glimpse of armed Europe rushing to conflict, after seeing and feeling the straining effort of the nations with every human being drawn into the maelstrom of one emotion, he had hardly conceived it possible that nature could have tucked away any three people in a spot so completely sequestered from the war.

He would not have come to Mervaux if it had not been for Henriette. He had admitted as much to himself going down on the train. When a man has seen a girl for an afternoon and a morning and keeps rehearsing the incidents of their meeting on his first holiday in Europe, he may well look forward to seeing her again with a certain personal curiosity. Sometimes the second impression is convincing of a temporary squint in

the eye at the time of the first. He had remarked on the way from Truckleford to London that he had been hit rather in the spirit of banter; but four weeks later he was in need of disillusioning. Though parenthetically it may be said that he did not put the situation to himself in such bold terms.

The stroll through the grounds of the chateau in the hour before dinner should have brought the disillusioning process well into being. But if it had even started it was arrested when Henriette picked a rosebud and fastened it in his buttonhole, an old form of illusioning or of reinforcing an illusion which loses nothing of its charm if the young woman be beautiful and smiles up at you when the rose is in place.

"We shall begin the portrait to-morrow, shan't we?" she asked, as they turned leisurely back toward the house.

"You still want to do it, despite the war? Won't it take some time?" he said.

"No longer than if there were no war. Mother will not let you go away immediately. Besides, didn't I hear you say that you could not get a sailing for some time? At least, we can make a start."

"I'm quite ready," he agreed. He was ready, even if the portrait took much longer than expected.

"And I keen to begin, painter fashion, when

I have a subject that I enjoy. Then the likeness to the ancestor—you see, the Sanfords very much want one of you to hang opposite the ancestor's. I promised it to them and I thought I'd make a copy of the ancestor to send to your father. Would you like it? Would he? We cousins when we are seventeenth through such a grand old ancestor must stand together."

Phil tried to find words of acceptance adequate to the offer.

"The favour is really on my side; it's an opportunity," she pursued.

He was conscious that she was looking intently at his profile, and when he glanced toward her she lowered her long lashes and raised her hand to brush back a strand of hair which was really not much out of place. Then she looked back at him thoughtfully, as one who had been engrossed in a problem.

"I'm not sure but a profile one would be better," she said.

"I thought we had settled that point," he parried.

"It would make you different from the ancestor."

"That's an advantage, but——"

"Well——"

"Can't you make it full face? The ancestor's not quite that."

They had stopped and were looking directly at

each other in the enjoyment of this verbal fencing.

"As you are now?" she suggested.

"Exactly!"

"I think it would be excellent," she admitted, after a pause of further thoughtful observation, squinting her eyes ever so little, then opening them wide as she passed final judgment.

"Good! It's so much more companionable."

"Yes, we can talk as I paint."

"Which is bound to give the subject life!" he concluded, as they started on.

"And the painter, too," she added.

As they drew near the house he saw Helen standing in the doorway. She seemed not to see him, but bent down to pull some burrs off her gown and then ran her hand with a sweeping motion across her forehead. She had watched the scene between Henriette and Philip on the walk and to her it had the familiarity of an habitual process of the life of her family. It was not the first time that she had had to greet a guest who accepted her only because she was Henriette's sister.

Her self-consciousness was not minimised by her disarray after her walk, though its depths were in the recollection of her tempers at Truckleford and her absurd action about the portrait and of having yielded to tears in her room, all as part of some strange influence which she could

not understand. Without calling to him she advanced, with something of the manner of a culprit who expects reproof.

"We are glad to see you at Mervaux," she said, holding out her hand.

Phil was reminded with a start almost of fresh discovery how like Henriette's was Helen's voice. But her face, without a sign of expression, seemed characterless. How could this girl belong to the same family as Henriette and the well-groomed mother? At the same time he felt a certain pity for her. She excited his curiosity in that awkward moment of silence after she had spoken her set phrase of welcome.

"You look tired, Helen. You have walked too far," said Henriette, solicitously slipping her arm in her sister's.

This, too, was as something foreseen by Helen; the next speech in the play. She was unresponsive at first, her own arms hanging by her side. Then spasmodically, as one who comes out of a fit of absent-mindedness, she raised her hand and pressed it over Henriette's against her waist, a look as for pardon in her eyes. It was not for Phil to note all the little signs that count. He had looked away from Helen to Henriette.

"Some of your pictures?" he said to Henriette when they entered the house, nodding toward the walls.

"Yes. Mother insists on a permanent exhibition," she replied deprecatingly.

He went from one to another, admiring, listening to her comments, and when they had been through the rooms he turned to her, saying:

"It's very wonderful to me. I stand a little in awe of you—you who have been in the Salon. I have great luck in cousins and I am luckier still in having an invitation to Mervaux."

She had not expected him to speak of the pictures in any critical fashion. How could he know anything about art? She liked his simple attitude. It was always more satisfactory than that of those who pretended to know and did not.

"And it's time for me to dress for dinner," she said, "though you need not hurry. Dinner at eight."

He had not thought of Helen while he had been looking at the pictures. After Henriette had gone he saw Helen huddled in the depths of a big chair in a corner half hidden by the open door, reading. With the brilliant light of Henriette departed, smaller lights became visible. Helen also was his cousin. But he felt a peculiar awkwardness in speaking to her. He was even afraid that one of her tempers might break on him. He hesitated, as he thought of something to say, and his glance fell on the pile of charcoal drawings on the side table.

"Are those your drawings?" he asked.

"I plead guilty," she responded equivocally.

"May I look?"

"Of course. Please do, if you would like to," she said. "They explain themselves," she added, without rising, "and it's at your own risk."

He took up one of the drawings.

"But I think it corking!"

"Honestly?" she asked. "Let me see which one it is!" She sprang up and looked over his shoulder, suddenly changed into a being of glowing vitality.

CHAPTER VIII

ANOTHER PHASE OF HELEN

POSSIBLY Philip did know something about art, as the result of a good deal of reading and his visits to galleries. Possibly, too, he had an innate appreciation of it. To Helen, his interest had momentarily rekindled the enthusiasm for her work which the war had stifled. As they took up drawing after drawing, she rather than he was the critic.

"Bad, but I like that part, there!" she went on. "This is sensational—not really good. Oh, cusses! Every time I look at that one it seems worse, and I thought it was so good at the start! Smudgy, but if you hold it off like that it's more like what I meant to do. One knows what one wants to do and then one's stupid fingers will not."

He was interested and more than interested, if silent. He was looking at her drawings and not her face. The effect was of the quality of her mind wrought by the cunning of her hand, and her voice was that of Henriette with a more emotional intonation than Henriette's, revealing the quality which even the cunning of her hand

could not interpret. There was more than he had supposed in this cousin.

"Haven't you ever exhibited?" he asked.

As he looked around it was almost with the expectation of seeing Henriette's face, which should go with Henriette's voice and the fervour of her talk; Henriette in the glory of enthusiasm, the enthusiasm which he knew she must possess and which he would like to arouse. But it was the face of Helen, sunburned and plain—almost too plain to have done such drawings.

"You think that I ought to?" she asked soberly. It was odd that she should seek his opinion when she had had that of M. Vaillant. "I was going to when the war came," she went on, still soberly. Then came the burst of confidence and her features lighted, their mobility alive with recollection as she told about the scene in the dining-room, forgetting herself, mimicking M. Vaillant and her own fears and the climax. She boasted of the thousand francs. She told him what she meant to do with that perfectly enormous sum; how she was going on drawing as long as she lived, caring for nothing else.

"Why wasn't she always like that?" Phil wondered. She ought to let her emotions always shine out of her eyes, play in her features. Was she really plain? He was unconscious of it; conscious only of her amazing vitality which had a magnetism that made him the kind of rapt lis-

tener which is the best urging to another flow of talk.

"Here you are holding that drawing like a waiter with a card on a salver who can't get my lady to look up from her knitting!" she finally exclaimed.

"Then I'll look at another," he said. "I certainly have luck in cousins."

After her confidences the drawings had even more appeal. He seemed to understand them better; her talk made him a sort of comrade in their making. But she did not offer to do a charcoal of him. He suggested it himself, as a companion souvenir for the portrait by Henriette.

"A profile!" she said.

"You choose," he agreed. He would like that better; and he hoped that she would talk about her troubles in making her fingers obey her mind while she was doing it.

"I could do it now! Twilight is just right on your face—yes, yes!" She drew a long breath as she studied the profile in a moment of silence, which was broken by a voice which might have been her own.

"Haven't you loiterers started to dress yet?" It was Henriette in the doorway, a warning finger raised. The doorway made a perfect frame for her; all surroundings seemed to suit her. "I don't wonder you forgot time was passing if you

caught Helen in one of her enthusiasms," she added. "Did she tell you how the war stopped her exhibition?"

"I'm going to have two portraits now," said Phil. "I begin to think well of myself! It won't take me ten minutes to dress."

"Nor me!" said Helen. "A wager! I'll be down first!" She preceded him, two steps at a time, up the stairs. "Do your best and see!" she called, as she darted into her room.

Her image in the mirror confronted her and she gave a cry as of amazement at it, which, however, did not permit her to waste any time. She came out of her room at the same instant that Phil opened his door, forgot her part again, and laughing in challenge dashed past him to the stairway, calling over her shoulder:

"Down first! Victory!"

What she wore was something in white to Phil, but the figure in its suppleness and grace—how like Henriette's it was!

Madame Ribot, who had put on her best gown and been an hour with a maid's assistance in the dressing, sat the guest opposite her, feeling that glow of satisfaction which aroused many recollections at having an agreeable man at the function of all functions to her—dinner as cooked by Jacqueline. Yet she would have dressed with equal care if she had been going to eat alone and her finger-nails would have been equally shiny

with over-attention; for self-respect's sake, as she would have said. But all who rehearse like an audience when the curtain rises.

Helen was silent—her part. Plain girl in plain gown, she might have been the family governess or a companion. Time had drilled her well in the part, time with the memories of pin-pricks behind the scenes.

It was through guests that Madame Ribot kept in touch with the world, which was an easier way in this era of her existence than to go to the world. Phil was soon aware that she expected him to tell of his tour of the warring nations. From Henriette came occasional questions and from Helen an infrequent "Yes," as of passion suppressed, until they came to coffee. Then she let go of herself with questions of her own.

"Were the women just as mad as the men in Germany?"

"Quite."

"And the men in the troop trains, with 'Nach Paris' chalked on the wagon doors—the men who were singing, singing as they went out to kill—if one had to go alone up a road to try to murder or be murdered, would he sing then?"

"Hardly!"

"And it would be murder, then. It isn't now!"

"The distinction between war and homicide," Phil replied.

Helen was leaning her elbows on the table, her chin cupped in her hands, all eyes, and eyes on fire. She compelled his attention.

"Did you see any one who was stopping to think why they were going to war—why? why? Not what the papers print and the professors say and the Kaiser prays—why in their own hearts? The reason that all the other nonsense hides?"

"The Kaiser tells them that they are fighting in defence," said Phil. "They take their reasons from him."

"Pardon me, that is no answer."

"Because the Germans are pigs—all are!" interjected Madame Ribot. "I have never met one who wasn't, even their princes. They are spoiling the Riviera."

"Conquest, though Rome, as I read my history, never called it that," Phil went on, keeping to Helen's theme. "They want their neighbours' fields. It's a get-rich-quick sort of game in internationalism."

"And the French?"

"Only want to keep their fields, to keep their France!" he said. "This was in every face, it seemed to me: to keep their France."

"So the French are in the right, not because we live with them and love them, but at the very bar of justice!" said Helen. "All the peasants in Mervaux are in the right! Oh, I'm glad that

I am not a German! And here we sit over our coffee so comfortably and those millions rushing to death! What poor little mortals we are! How lacking in imagination! Each with his little concerns in his own little hole—I grieving because the war spoils my exhibition! No one thinks of the agony of black years for the multitude of mothers and wives. It is too ghastly! Not one wants to die! Who should want to die when the world is so beautiful? Yet they go out to die!"

"Helen, you are overwrought!" said her mother. "There must be wars; there always have been wars."

"One might say that about thistles," Helen replied half inaudibly, staring at the tablecloth.

"And what can we do?" persisted Madame Ribot, who had held back her protests less because of the spell of Helen's fervour than from a hostess's politeness due to Phil's evident interest. "Yes, what would you do, my dear? Become a *vivandière*? Surely not nurse! You have admitted that your nerves could not stand the sight of blood——" Madame Ribot broke off. She did not like to think of the sight of blood herself.

"Perhaps they would now," said Helen with some determination, after a pause. "This is different."

"I am not sure!" Madame Ribot replied

promptly, for her decision was made that Helen should remain at Mervaux during the war. "And shan't we go out of doors?"

"You feel very deeply," said Phil to Helen as they passed into the grounds where, in utter stillness, the trees cast long shadows from the light of the half moon.

"Every one does," she replied, "only I forget and blurt out my feelings. Perhaps—oh, that is the great hope—the war will do good in its way—good to those who survive!"

"We'll not talk about the war!" said Madame Ribot.

With the soft air of a summer evening, the sense of security and seclusion, the glow after a good meal and bedtime approaching, Madame Ribot had not the slightest desire to think of horrors. She was content to be as she was and where she was, serene, unworried. They were not going to speak of the war, but they did, as every one would while it lasted, no matter how strong his resolution. The war was here in Mervaux, at Truckleford, at Longfield, everywhere and in every mind. It was a maelstrom, drawing all thoughts toward it.

"When the troops come back triumphant, I want to see them march under the Arc de Triomphe," Henriette said. "I hope it will be in the spring, when the horse-chestnuts are in bloom."

"You are sure that they will win?" Phil asked.

"Aren't we already in Alsace and aren't the Germans stopped at Liège?"

It did look like early victory then. Hadn't General Joffre issued his manifesto from Mulhausen? But could Madame Ribot have foreseen what was coming along the great main road one day she would not have been so serene and Helen would not have felt that she was pinioned in her helplessness in the midst of tragedy.

For Phil it was singularly restful. He had been on the go for weeks. He had collected impressions without digesting them; and the prospect of the coming days at Mervaux was sufficient for him.

Helen had kept silence faithfully after they were out of doors. As she said good-night the hand that she gave him was strangely lifeless and her voice lacked its customary vibrant quality. When she reached her room she stood motionless for a long time, looking out at the moon. The change which the war had wrought was not the only inexplicable one that had come over her.

"I hope that he does not stay!" she said at last.

CHAPTER IX

A MESSAGE FROM ALSACE

QUITE a sensational thing happened in the Ribot household. Usually Madame Ribot had breakfast in her room and about ten went for a walk in the garden. The morning after Phil's arrival she was on hand to pour coffee in the dining-room and to serve one of Jacqueline's omelets.

"Mother, this is epochal!" said Henriette.

"An inspiration!" said Madame Ribot, who could never be accused of the hypocrisy of feigning strenuosity. She was a frank advocate of repose and it had not deserted her even with this departure from custom. "I did it for our seventeenth cousin. I want him to feel at home."

She liked the seventeenth cousin. He was good-looking; he had good manners. His American quality appealed to her French quality. She would have liked to show him to her friends as a seventeenth cousin, which would have been proof of the quality of her own origin on the American side.

"You are to stay as long as you please," she went on. "If Longfield is your American home

and Truckleford your English home, then Mer-
vaux is your French."

"Not as long as I please," Phil replied.
"One must have a sense of self denial."

"Very well said," she countered. It was worth
while coming down to breakfast to hear him say
it. "Perhaps I shall insist that it be as long
as the hostess pleases. What then?"

Yes, what would he say to that? Her shrewd
eyes reflected a teasing spark which when she
was young must have been as effectual as Hen-
riette's.

"But I might not know the signs," he said,
"and mistake my pleasure for yours."

"I should tell you."

"Does that mean that you think I should
have to be told?" He was enjoying this play
of words as much as she.

"No, not you, cousin. You are the kind to
whom one would always hate to say *au revoir*
and could never say good-bye."

"This is almost a flirtation," said Henriette.
"At least he must stay till the portrait is finished.
We shall start at once."

"I begin to feel awfully stuck on myself, as
we say at home!" said Phil. "Do I sit for both
portraits at the same time?" he asked, turning to
Helen.

Henriette also looked at her sister rather
quickly. Helen's eyes smiled above her coffee

cup, which hid the lump of nose; they, too, had a teasing spark.

"No," she replied. "Oils take much longer than charcoal. Let Henriette get started before I butt in. Isn't that it—butt in?"

"Yes, the correct American for your meaning—though a little archaic now—but not for mine," he said. "I'm ready for all the artists. Let them come."

"Not this morning," Helen concluded.

She had already put on her sun hat and gone when Madame Ribot smilingly from the doorway watched Henriette and Phil, her easel under his arm, going up the path. The borderir ees of the little estate were on a terrace which gave a broad view. Here Henriette set up her easel and put Phil in a rustic chair in the position that pleased her, his only condition that he sit facing so he could watch her at work being granted. She was the real picture to him; the one that made it worth while to pose. He could look past her over the fields rolling away to the horizon, with the rows of trees of the main road marching across the foreground.

Human specks dotted the fields, women, old men, and boys who had been at work since dawn harvesting the grain, since the able-bodied men were away at war. A figure which he recognised approached a nearby group. The bent backs straightened. Faintly he could hear their voices

as they passed the time of day, and then a laugh all round as Helen became one of them in effort as well as in spirit, raking and binding the sheaves.

For the time being he said nothing about it to Henriette, but occasionally his glance stole away from her toward Helen, who kept on with her labour. The breeze carried her voice and laugh, which was like a rich echo of Henriette's, and at length he heard her singing a French song, in which the other workers joined. Time passed rapidly watching the figures in the field and Henriette—too rapidly.

"We are started, though there is nothing to see," said Henriette finally. "We will rest till after luncheon."

The peasants, too, had stopped work. They were seating themselves on the sheaves or sprawling on the hard, dry, yellow stubble for their mid-day meal. He heard them laugh at some sally of Helen's before she started across the field toward where he was sitting. Flushed from the sun and exercise, she cried out, as she approached:

"They say I do it like a veteran! It was great fun—and I was helping France!"

Phil had been envying her the exercise and told her so.

"There's room for volunteers," she suggested. And she looked at him and then at Henriette.

"I dare you both to come out there this afternoon!" she added.

"Done—if your sister will let me off! Will you?"

Henriette shot one of her quick glances at Helen.

"Perhaps you will volunteer, too," Helen parried.

"Why not? I'm game!" Henriette replied.

"Good! It's the best way of helping that I know. They are very hard pressed to get the grain cut before it is overripe. It will be straight sickling this afternoon on the Pigou patch. Poor Madame Pigou's son is at the front and she has only Jean who is but ten to help, and she's too poor to hire a reaper."

When Madame Ribot heard the plan she smiled and nodded approval, reminding Henriette that she must wear gloves in order not to blister her hands. She herself, under her parasol, walked out to see them begin.

Madame Pigou, with deep wrinkles around her kindly mouth and hands already stiffened by labour at forty, protested at first.

"Such work is not for you," she said to Henriette. "Nothing takes it out of your back more than sickling, unless it's hoeing."

"Oh, none of us expects to be as adept as you," replied Henriette, "or as Helen, who has a natural talent for such things."

"Mademoiselle Helene," said Madame Pigou, with an affectionate smile of fellowship at Helen, "is one of us. Thank you all—thank you for the sake of Armand. I shall write him how you helped," she added.

"Mind that you don't overdo!" Madame Ribot warned Henriette as she started back to the chateau.

Henriette did not overdo. With skirt tucked above her slim ankles and an old pair of gloves up to her elbows, she used her sickle much as she had her brush, cutting her small swaths handily after she had learned the trick and often stopping to deride her own efforts or to boast of them very merrily, holding the attention of every one on herself. It was no cross to her that she did not keep up with the others. Madame Pigou complimented her for another reason. It was wonderful that Henriette should cut even a single sheaf; the condescension of a beautiful princess who used a real trowel and some real mortar in laying the cornerstone of a public building.

Helen, humming snatches of song, kept her swath even with Madame Pigou. Her plain features as she bent to her work seemed in keeping with it. There was truth in Madame Pigou's saying that she was "one of us." But Madame did not set a fast pace, for she saw that Helen meant to hold her own.

When Phil had finished a swath he turned and cut toward Henriette in hers, and thus they met face to face as he nipped the last straws from in front of her sickle; her face flushed, too, with exercise, as they both stood erect, he with head bare, his sleeves rolled, drawing a deep breath and stretching his supple, square shoulders.

Helen pausing to rest had a glimpse of him thus; and it occurred to her how he must have looked far away in the Southwest when he was directing the workmen in railroad-building. Then she sent the sharp knife athwart the bundle of straws that she had gathered in her hand.

"A good, straight man!" whispered Madame Pigou. "He knows how to work."

"So I was thinking," murmured Helen absently. Then, a sheaf finished, she looked up again to see them standing in quite the same position of confidential comradeship. "Cousin, more praise!" she called, and repeated in English what Madame Pigou had said of him.

"A real compliment, this!" he replied.

"And tell him that he should put on a hat," said Madame Pigou. "The sun is hot."

"Not so. Not to me. I like it. I play tennis in August bare-headed."

"The Americans stand the sun better than we," said Madame Pigou.

"But he is not an Indian. He is white," Helen explained. "American summers are hotter."

For Madame thought that most of the population of the States were Indians. Phil caught what she was saying.

"A white Indian, but not savage!" he called.

It had all been as good as play to young Jean, watching these grand people from the chateau reaping, until a distant sound on the road attracted his attention. It was the faint tramp of men and the rumble of guns. As the head of a column of infantry appeared past the screen of a stretch of woodland, he cried out, "Soldiers!" and ran.

The cry was taken up far and near over the fields. Most of the harvesters started toward the road and with them went Henriette and Helen and Phil. But not Madame Pigou. She stood watching the figures all of a pattern in their uniforms, moving like automatons sharp cut against the skyline, and then bent to her work. Her son could not be among these battalions. She knew that he was in Alsace. Buxom peasant girls and toothless old men and women standing by the roadside called out the joyful God-speed of their hearts to the soldiers of France.

The men in their red trousers and blue coats knew nothing of where they were going; and the gunners astride their horses and seated on the gun-carriages and caissons looked as if they did not care, if only action soon came. Still they kept coming, that myriad-legged, human cater-

pillar, its convolutions following the grade of the road in either direction to the horizon. It seemed a creature of irresistible man-power and still coming, when the cousins started back to their field.

"They are between us and the Germans, those brave fellows!" said Madame Pigou, her features in a transport of joy, with a long look toward the moving blue silhouettes sharpened now by the low sun. What more was there to say?

"I hope we shall not see them driven back," Helen whispered in English.

She took the lead in insisting that Madame Pigou stop work. If she did not, they would not help her to-morrow. They walked back to the village with her.

"In America the women do not work in the fields," Phil managed to say in French.

"What do they do?" asked Madame Pigou. "Ah, I understand. They are all rich."

Jean who had gone ahead came running toward them with a letter which the postman had left during the day at the cottage. There was an inarticulate explosion of breath from Helen. She had recognised the nature of the letter, though the peasant woman had not.

"The first in our village!" Helen whispered to Phil.

He understood her meaning. How could they ease the blow for the mother was their thought, as

her calloused fingers tore open the envelope? There was no way. They had to watch it fall.

"Dead on the field of honour!" she repeated to herself. She half closed her eyes as silently she adjusted herself to fate's decree, then folded the message and placed it in her bosom. "It is for France! It is war!" she said, this woman of a race that knows well what war is and what it brings. "Jean, you must be my man, now. Armand is dead!"

Jean, hoarse from cheering the battalion on the road, nestled against his mother.

"Thank you for helping me!" she said simply, turning to the others.

Her stoicism seemed to have its roots in the soil itself, tilled and fought for by centuries of ancestors. But the suppressed suffering in her eyes as she spoke had brought the war nearer to Mervaux than the throb of marching infantry and the thunder of guns and nearer to Phil than anything he had seen or felt before.

"Letters of that kind are dropping all over France," said Helen, when she described the incident to her mother.

"Don't!" said Madame Ribot. "Don't let us dwell upon it!"

So it was not mentioned at dinner. Yet though the food was equally good, Madame Ribot equally genial and Henriette equally sparkling, none could help thinking of Madame Pigou; and the fact

of that column on the way to the front brought a suggestion of possibilities.

"Remember that you are to remain as long as you please," said Madame Ribot to Phil as she bade him good-night. "I feel some way that—well, you give us a sense of security."

CHAPTER X

THE VOICE AT HIS ELBOW

WHY no more news of the brilliant advance into Alsace? What meant the official silence about Mulhausen and Liège? At Mervaux they read the papers no less helplessly than elsewhere.

The three cousins assisted Madame Pigou in finishing her harvest. No more soldiers passed along the road; Henriette went on with her painting, and Helen was absent on other missions. Phil was drifting and he found drifting pleasant, though it was carrying him onto the rocks.

"I ought to go or I'll be hit for good!" he thought, in moments of sanity.

Seventeenth cousinship was all very well, but he had better face the facts. He was a young man who had to earn his own living three thousand miles away; and here was a young woman in a chateau forty miles from Paris who had been bred in French ways. He saw only Henriette; he lived Henriette; and Madame Ribot who watched him realised better than he how serious was his case. But how could he go with the portrait unfinished? How could he go when he

did not want to go; when he was perfectly willing to allow Henriette to go on for months painting his portrait?

Sometimes Helen broke her rule of leaving the two to themselves, to come and stand for a while and watch her sister at work. Phil grew rather to resent her presence on such occasions, for she was usually silent and Henriette became silent, too, as if under restraint. A fear that he had shown signs of regarding Helen as an intruder led him to remind her one morning at breakfast that she had not yet kept her promise to make a charcoal portrait as a companion to Henriette's painting to take back to Longfield. He realised that the suggestion was consummate egoism as soon as he had made it; the more so as she received it with a naïve, baffling surprise.

"You have forgotten it!" he said.

"Almost," she replied thoughtfully. "You are very polite."

For an instant she regarded him with fixed inquiry; then out of the depths of her eyes he saw the mischief bubbling forth as it had when she held the mirror up to him across the table at Truckleford. In that mood he knew that he must expect any unconventional sally.

"Portraits which please a father and mother proud of a handsome son are not exactly in my line," she said. "I like wrinkles and irregular features. It's a sort of specialism with me to

pick out these as the salient points. There's no telling what I might do with you."

"Of course, Helen's forte is caricature," Henriette explained. "I quite understand her reasons"—she paused, lowering her head and looking at Phil through her lashes, daring a thrust—"after having spent days with your features."

"Not to mention that I have spent days with yours!" he thrust back.

"The penalty of not having had a profile view!"

"It is I who am to make the profile—I had forgotten that," said Helen. "We'll do it this morning. I feel in the mood."

He was not long in doubt as to the nature of the mood. It was an abandon of fanciful humour.

"Mind, you are not to look around at me, but at Henriette!" she said warningly, as they went up the path. "I'm strictly unofficial."

He had hardly settled himself in his pose when she broke out laughing. He looked around inquiringly.

"You are breaking the rules!" she cried. "Remember, you got yourself into this and you must play the game. I'm making a profile."

"I can't help it, can I, because I am so fond of myself that I want more and more pictures

of myself?" he complained quizzically. "Posing may yet become a disease with me."

"You will be crying too much cousin as well as too much ancestor," said Henriette, entering into the spirit of the occasion. He was at their mercy.

"It's the third degree of cousinship!" he said.

What would the class of 1911, let alone P. O'Brien, the foreman of the construction gang at Las Palmas, say if they saw him now? P. O'Brien, at least, would not call it "a man's job." There were two voices in his ears: one from lips he could not see and the other from those he could.

Leisurely, Henriette mixed her colours, inclining her head this way and that as she did when she looked at her hair in the mirror. Then the graceful arm rose and the slim fingers, holding the brush daintily, put a dab on the canvas.

"Did you wear spurs?" asked the voice of the unseen person.

"What?"

"Don't look around! I mean, did you wear spurs when you were in the Southwest? Of course you did, hugeous Spanish spurs and an enormous sombrero and woolly sheepskin trousers."

"As you say!" Phil replied.

"You see, I am doing cartoons of our hero's life," Helen explained. "Here he is as he saw

himself and the Rocky Mountains when he first arrived, with his college diploma under his arm."

Only lines of hieroglyphic simplicity, and Phil in enormous spurs and sombrero, with a great roll of parchment under his arm, was looking down on some ant-hills. Only lines, but the nose and the chin under the sombrero's were unmistakably Phil's.

"Now, as our hero sees himself roping his first steer—and as he really was!" she went on. "We are all for realism."

A Phil with one arm akimbo, who roped the steer with his thumb and little finger holding a thread, was followed in the next scene by a Phil fluttering heaven high and a steer romping across the prairie.

"What next in the hero's progress?" she continued. "Undaunted, he goes on his way, our *conquistadore*—is that the right word in Spanish, cousin?"

"Yes," admitted Phil, who could not see the drawings or confess his curiosity about them.

Henriette went on painting, with intermissions when she lowered her head behind the easel to hide her amusement, perhaps, and others when she murmured an apology for Helen; but she was charming all the time.

"Yes, I have it!" said Helen. "He saves pretty Pepita, the stern, old governor's daughter, from the revolutionista bandittistas—copyright

reserved, plot perfectly original! But how does he save Pepita? With one glance of his eye?"

Phil moved a trifle restlessly, but said nothing.

"No, there are too many revolutionistas! He might subdue four or five, but not all of them—not even he, particularly when he has left his college diploma in his tent—and the dark Spanish girl must be saved. It shall be six-shooters—big six-shooters! 'Tis done!"

Phil was seeing Henriette's face and hearing a voice like Henriette's, but with a richness, a variety of tonal range, and a whimsicality and infectiousness which hers lacked. It went perfectly with Henriette's smile at times, for she was enjoying the situation.

"Our hero triumphs!" Helen continued. "He restores the beautiful belle to her true lover, but with rare nobility of soul hides the mortal wound which her eyes have given him. For she is not for him. Now he starts for home to found some more American colleges and foreign missions, his pockets bulging with gold—thus—home to his first love, the girl in the kitchen at Longfield who makes strawberry shortcakes. Here he eats a strawberry shortcake as big as a mountain. Yet another transition—he is in Europe. Majestic he sits and the little cousins look up at him and worship this Gibson man from the United States of Amerikee. Thus he and

thus the little cousins! This is triumph, indeed! Now our story is told. We depart."

"Wait!" cried Phil, springing up. "For what I have suffered I want to see the result."

He faced a Helen shaking with laughter, teasing, delightful, in its spontaneous ring. Every fibre in her body seemed to be laughing. She would not have been unattractive then, even had her nose been lumpier than it was.

"It will be painful, I warn you!" she said. He was looking over her shoulder. "How do you like the local colour? I put in one cactus for that."

"That is enough for Mexico," he agreed. "And may I have them? Father will double up when he sees them and Jane will roar."

"I was doing them to make myself laugh," she said soberly, turning her head. He caught a gleam from her eyes baffling in its brightness, as a sharp sunbeam through a lattice. "If they make other people laugh, so much to the good in war time."

"Which means that I may have them?"

"Yes. But I have yet to make my charcoal of you; so back to your pose, please. This is a serious business."

He recognised that it was by the unattractive way that she drew down her lips as she ceased smiling. A serious business! Though he did not look at her, he could feel her presence; the in-

tensity that she put into her work. He could hear the "Oh, cusses!" muttered under her breath, which were only interjections in the course of series of questions and comments, jumping from Longfield and back again. He found himself interested in answering. He betrayed his enthusiasms, his ambitions, and his love for his country, which was as simple and as inherent as that of the peasants in the fields for their France.

"America is to-morrow!" he said.

This voice of the girl unseen had transformed him from the atmosphere of cartoons to that of a fine reality. He was speaking better than he knew and answering Helen's questions to the enchanting face of Henriette who, in her rapt listening while her brush was still, urged him on no less by her smile and charm than Helen with her voice of emotion.

"America is to-morrow!" repeated Helen. "I like that thought. You take in all who come to give them a chance for your to-morrow; amalgamate the prejudices that made this war. You live for the rising rather than the setting sun and you love your country not in a boasting way, but in the blood. Is that it?"

"Yes, it's in the blood after all these generations; and we want to breed it into the blood of every newcomer."

"Even the Germans—the Huns?"

"They should cease to be Germans in America

in the same way that my ancestors gave up their European allegiance and fought in order that the newcomers should be free from it. If they prefer to be German, let them stay in Germany."

The afternoon wore on as under a spell wrought unconsciously for him with the beauty of Henriette before him and a certain magnetic force at his elbow—which suddenly snapped as Helen said:

"I don't know—probably I'll never do it any better! Thank you!"

By this he understood that the drawing was finished. He rose as one will when the end of an incident impels physical release.

"Enough for to-day!" said Henriette, a touch of sharpness in her voice as she rose, too.

Helen looked exhausted and numb. She had put all her vitality into a sheet of cardboard.

"You, too, Henriette!" exclaimed Phil, as he looked at the result.

At the bottom of the drawing of Henriette, with arm uplifted as about to lay brush to canvas, and of himself in the pose which Helen had arranged, was scrawled, "Seventeenth cousins." Both Henriette and Phil flushed, and Helen looked from one face to the other lingeringly, keenly. She had caught the grace and charm of her sister as something inviting, vivid and finished as art itself, and the note of the man was of a downright simplicity of clear profile which

seemed to see nothing except the face before him.

"You think it bad!" said Helen. "It is—it is! But I warned you that I can't do anything but put the person as I see him into line."

In the resulting impulse, which had a certain desperation about it, she grasped the edge of the cardboard in both hands to tear it in two.

"No!" said Henriette peremptorily. "I never liked anything you have done better."

"But I'm used to tearing up things when they displease me!" persisted Helen stubbornly.

"At least, wait!" remonstrated Phil. "It is wonderful of Henriette."

"And of you, cousin!" said Henriette.

Phil took the picture from Helen's hands, which now released it in the relaxation of philosophical disinterestedness. What he saw was a man in love with a woman at an easel, and the man was himself. The truth hit him fairly between the eyes.

"Sometimes I don't know what comes out in my own pictures till I look at them a second time—and this is not so bad for me. Have it if you want it," Helen added, as she bent to pick up her drawing materials, "and I'll go and wash my smudgy hands." Rather hurriedly, as if some one or something were pursuing her, she went toward the house.

In a quandary Phil watched her out of sight.

When he turned again to Henriette her back was toward him and she was taking her canvas off the easel. How like was her figure to the one which had disappeared under the trees!

"Helen has a distinct gift, hasn't she?" Henriette remarked.

"Yes, and a distinct character," Phil replied thoughtfully.

"A touch of melancholy. Even mother and I never know what she will do next."

He folded the easel and took it under one arm, carrying Helen's charcoal under the other, while Henriette carried the portrait, and they started slowly back to the house.

"It was wonderful what you said about America," she said, looking at him with appealing seriousness.

"Why?" he asked.

"It was a breath of the real America," she answered. "I've fallen into the provincial French view. America is to-morrow! I like that. You've made me feel the call of America; aroused the dormant American corpuscles in my blood," she continued, gazing thoughtfully at the path and then up at him. "I want to go to America. I'd like to see those Rocky Mountains and I'd like to pay a return visit from Mervaux to Longfield."

"You would? But you'd find it quiet—little to do."

"Is there much to do at Mervaux? Shouldn't I have my painting? My American corpuscles would make me feel at home."

She had carried him a stage farther on his course, dispelling the doubts which had occurred to him as a warning to pause.

"I—I——" he began. His throat seemed out of order; he was stuttering. Madame Ribot's call from the doorway of the house came as a mixture of relief and unwelcome interruption.

"Somebody will be late for dinner if they do not hurry," said Madame Ribot. "And the news is not good. Even Count de la Grange, who has just been here, admits that it is not. However, he doesn't think that anything will happen to disturb us here."

CHAPTER XI

SHE SAID, "YES!"

DISTINCTLY it was triumph that the eyes from the mirror reflected back into Henriette's in her room. For dinner Henriette chose a gown which she had not worn since Phil's arrival. She had kept it hanging in the far corner of the closet, possibly owing to the fact that the cut was the same as that of Helen's one dinner gown. Though made of richer material than Helen's, it heightened the similarity of the two girls' figures and emphasised the contrast between the beauty of the one and the plainness of the other. Either seemed appropriate to its wearer; to Henriette by right of her vivacious charm which was particularly in evidence that evening, and to Helen by the predestination of nature.

Henriette talked of a visit to America; she would talk of nothing but America. Her mother's shrewd little eyes hovered between her and Phil questioningly, with a trace of frown at intervals.

"I shall claim you for a stroll in the garden," said Madame Ribot to Phil after dinner, "and then I shall retire very early." She did not say

so, but she was going to pack some of her most precious things for departure in case of necessity.

Phil had an idea that she wished to speak to him and to him alone of something on her mind; he knew that he had something on his mind which he would like to mention to her. They walked some distance along the path in that silence which makes two people conscious of wanting to know what it is that the other's hesitation prevents him from saying.

On this occasion it was never spoken; for Madame Ribot broke the silence by remarking how extremely dark it was. The moon was behind a cloud.

Then the war again! She mentioned a letter which she had received that afternoon about the death of the son of an old friend. It was all very terrible; the world would never be the same again. She hoped that they were safe at Mervaux. Surely with the British and the Russians fighting with the French there was no danger of another siege of Paris.

As they approached the house on their return, Phil saw a figure moving along another path, so dim that it was hardly more than a shadow. Yet it recalled to him with a thrill the Henriette with an appeal in her eyes for an invitation to America. She was walking very slowly. The moon showing a gleam of light as it passed between two clouds revealed the figure with its head bowed

and hands clasped behind, the face indistinct. Was she thinking of what he was thinking?

When he said good-night at the door to Madame Ribot, he remarked that it was too early to retire and he would take another stroll.

"I think you will find Henriette about the grounds somewhere," she said. Phil caught himself starting at mention of the name. "Probably Helen, too," she added.

"I'll look for them," he replied.

She smiled and nodded to herself, as he turned away; but the frown which had shown itself on her brow at dinner returned and remained long after she was in her room.

"If—if history should repeat itself!" she murmured.

Phil started up the path which the figure he was seeking had taken. The moonbeams held until on a bench under a tree they revealed her with head turned away and bent, still in thought.

"Hello!" he called, stooping to pass under the branches.

"Hello!" was the answer of surprise.

"Do I disturb a brown study?" he asked.

"Almost black in this darkness—no, not black—just human!" she answered, without looking around.

Very sweet that voice in the darkness, resonant with fellowship. No man ever knows why the impulse comes; but most men know the incident

that let it go. With Phil it was the voice associated with a face in front of an easel. They had the night and the world to themselves, there under the tree. He might best have made his speech looking into her eyes under another tree where she was making a portrait; but it did not happen that way, such things being always as they happen.

"I have something to say to you. Please listen!"

He was resting his knee against the bench and his hand pressed hard on the bark of the tree as he confessed that he was past the point of resisting what had seemed folly to him till hope had overcome judgment.

She was very still as she listened. Her silence had the effect of urging him on. And he had the question fairly out, now. Was the call of America strong enough to win her to go back to America with him?

Sudden and wild came the answer of, "Yes!" Then her hand with a desperate quickness rose to her face which was still turned from him, and she sprang to her feet and with a frightened cry disappeared into the darkness.

Phil remained where he was, as inanimate as the tree itself. Yes—and then flight! Yes, with the ring of life and passion in it—and then flight!

CHAPTER XII

THE GUNS SPEAK

WAS the war making her mad? Her "Yes!" was repeating itself in Helen's ears in a haunting, beating refrain as she hurried toward the house. She had played a lie; she had made a mockery of a man in his most serious mood! She had accepted an offer of marriage in Henriette's name! How was she to explain? What was she to do? With every turn of her groping flashes of thought for some solution, the wickedness and agony of her situation grew worse.

In the doorway she met Henriette just coming out. Helen drew back as if she had been struck, cowed, her cheeks burning, her lips twitching, her eyes dull as with torture before an accuser. Henriette could only surmise that some accident had happened.

"What is it? Why don't you speak?" she demanded.

Henriette was going out into the garden and Phil might come to her with the words, "Don't forget; you said yes!" precipitating an awkward crisis. The force which he had put into his

words was proof that he was no faint-hearted lover.

"Why don't you speak? You look as if you had seen ghosts!" Henriette persisted.

Helen's way of mending the error of one impulse had ever been with another impulse.

"Not here!" she gasped. "In my room! Yes, Henriette, you must know!"

When they were in the room and Helen, haggard and choking, faced Henriette, calm and wondering, the contrast between the two was at a climax. Something like appeal for sympathy appeared in Helen's eyes as she struggled for a beginning. Then without beginning she broke into laughter, which was prolonged until she was forced to wipe her eyes.

"Well, I hope you have not gone out of your head!" said Henriette. "I refuse to see the fun of the thing until I know what it is."

Laughter had pointed the way for Helen.

"It would be funny if it were not so awful," she said. Between laughs, hectic laughs, she told the story of what had happened under the tree. "The joke was too good, shameful as it was. I couldn't help it. I said only a few words and looking the other way—it was so dark—he mistook my voice for yours—and what is to be done now?"

Henriette's eyes were narrow slits, become like her mother's, and her lips tightly compressed

made her mouth a short gash and drew down her nose till the cartilage of the thin bridge showed white.

"Yes, what to do!" she said icily. "Why do you come to me?"

"I—I don't know," Helen answered.

"Oh!" said Henriette.

Helen tried to smile, but it was a poor effort.

"I couldn't resist the temptation. Don't you see, Henriette? It's the knot in my brain, I suppose."

"But, I repeat, why do you come to me?"

Helen was in an agony of confusion under her sister's glare.

"I thought you'd like to know what he did intend for you—I——"

"Leave my affairs to me!"

"It was only one of my foolish impulses, Henriette!"

Confined anger flashing rage from Henriette's eyes carried her forward a step. A storm burst on Helen's head.

"Impulses!" exclaimed Henriette. "Not that—spite! Yes, and jealousy and sour grapes and stolen goods! You wanted to know what it was like to have a man make love to you! You could not resist the novelty, the temptation. Am I to blame because I am good-looking and you are not? Because I have money? He thought it was my voice, you say. How do you think it

makes me feel to have a sister with a voice like mine always with me? Humble as a mouse and as cunning, pretending to efface yourself, working in the fields with the peasants, the plain girl who cannot afford good clothes, and your very unpretentious charcoals—yes, you know your part! Cunning and spite, that is it, and jealous of my work—and always with me—I——”

The upshot of Henriette's anger was a blow on Helen's cheek, so sharp that she staggered under it; but it was the least of the blows she had received in that revelation of her sister's feeling.

“I'll not engage in a boxing match with you, Henriette,” she said coolly, after two or three hard swallows. “If I do appear that way to other people it's time I knew it. Perhaps there is a little truth in it. I'm a woman, yes. I should like to be good-looking—at least, not as plain as I am. It does hurt me that I have such a kill-joy of a face.”

“If I were as plain as you I'd accept the fact and be a nurse or something. Anyway, I'd try to make the best of it by——”

“Try to make myself as attractive as possible, you mean.”

“Oh, you don't neglect that! You've found out that you are least unattractive when you grin and laugh. One may try to overdo that and be silly.”

A faint and peculiar smile twitched Helen's lips, and sad, too.

"I've tried to avoid that temptation. I remembered the fable about the donkey who tried to caper and the old saw about seeing yourself as others see you."

"It's time!" said Henriette mercilessly; but her features had resumed their calm.

"I am going away, Henriette," Helen went on, "and if you will wait I'll find Cousin Phil and confess the trick that I played. That is what I should have done at once."

"Suppose that I saved you the humiliation—and it must be humiliation even to such a practical joker as you," Henriette replied, smiling now. "Suppose that I let it stand that he has proposed to me and I have accepted?"

"Henriette!" Helen put accusation into the word.

"Well!"

"That will mean that you have agreed to be his wife—to go to America with him! Would you do that?"

"Perhaps he will come to Europe to live."

"That was not his expectation."

"So you have arranged the details for me, too?"

"No, I have told you all. What I mean is that he is not like the other men. He is down-

right and not used to such affairs. I—I mean, his heartbreak might last.”

“By which you imply that I am a flirt. Is that it?”

“No, not that you mean to be. But one so charming as you and so used to attention finds it very easy to win men.”

“And”—Henriette smiling quite sweetly took an excruciatingly long time to say it—“you love him yourself. Is that it?”

Helen was silent, her eyes downcast, feeling all the blood in her body running to her face. To have the question put bluntly—this question which she had never put to herself!

“How you blush!” Henriette remarked. “Oh, I’ve watched you plotting! I know!”

Helen looked up and her glance was so steady and prolonged that Henriette averted hers.

“No, I have not plotted. I plot for such a purpose! One does not know what is in one’s heart and one does not say ‘no’ or ‘yes’ if it means lying. I am going away, so I’ll leave it to you. He shall not know that it was not you.”

“On the contrary, on thinking it out I’ve concluded to win my own proposals—I think I’m capable of it,” she smiled charmingly, “and not to work in pairs in affairs of this kind.”

“That is better,” Helen agreed. “It’s more straightforward for me.”

“And gives you a chance, too,” said Henriette

benignly. "As it's dark, perhaps he may take pity and elope with you to-night."

"In that case," Helen replied, with an effort at humour, "we shall be breakfasting in Paris and not at Mervaux."

As she held the door open before starting on her errand she hesitated, thinking that perhaps Henriette might ask forgiveness for the blow which still stung her cheek. But Henriette gave no sign for contrition and Helen made no further overture. Sturdily as a grenadier she marched down the stairs and out into the grounds to have the agony of her confession to Philip Sanford over as speedily as possible. She was suffering horribly, but the spirit of a new freedom possessed her. She blessed that thousand francs and uttered a silent prayer for M. Vaillant, out there in his place among the walls of men trying to stem the tide of invasion, in a way that would have made him feel that he had not been an art dealer in vain.

The Rubicon was crossed, and plain girls no less than Cæsar feel relieved after a decision which makes the path to battle clear and chooses the enemy. The thousand francs would take her to America. Perhaps if M. Vaillant had liked her charcoals well enough to exhibit them, some one in New York would take them up. If not, well, she had seen those enormous American papers with pages and pages of cartoons. Might

not she sell enough of her conceits to make a living? With the American strain in her blood she ought to be able to adapt herself to conditions. She recalled the saying of her old teacher: "Don't be afraid. Make the fight. Crusts earned by pot-boilers taste sweet if true art is in your heart."

She felt a new strength in her limbs; the very breaths in her lungs going deeper, as true warriors' must when they cross the Rubicon. But ahead of her was a duty which was humiliation in every fibre for any woman; yes, the more so the plainer she was. For she was a woman, quite full grown; she thought of herself in this way for the first time.

Her courage was screwed to the sticking point until she reached the terrace and, on the spot where that afternoon she had drawn cartoons of jest and the true picture of him and Henriette, saw Phil standing, his figure outlined in the rays of the moon which had at last freed itself of obscuring clouds. She stopped, numb, cold. Then she drew a deep breath, drove her fingers into her palms, and Phil turned at the sound of a merry "Hello!" to see Helen before him, laughing softly as she had over her work in the afternoon. She hurried her speech, with interludes of laughter which asked for forgiveness.

"You know how mischievous I am—and—well—mind, I'll keep the secret, and my voice is

like Henriette's and my figure, too, they say—and when you began to—well, to be eloquent to me on the bench, taking me for Henriette, I couldn't resist. I—I'm ashamed, but it was such a joke—I couldn't help it!" she finished with a peal of laughter.

He had guessed the truth before she came to the climax and he rose to his part in answering laughter; lame, but still it was laughter, for which she thanked him from her heart and brain, now giddy with relief.

"The joke is on me!" he agreed.

"It was wicked—there isn't the slightest excuse!" she proceeded.

"Personally, I don't see how you could have resisted it," he said. "Honestly not."

"It's—it's awfully good of you!" she replied. "I don't feel quite so shameful now that you take it that way. You're a brick!"

She was pleased with the way that she was carrying it out, thanks to having crossed the Rubicon and put all illusions behind her.

"Acting for Henriette, I believe that you said yes," he resumed quizzically.

Laughter was the cue here, too. She was prompt with it.

"Did I? You were so eloquent I thought that I ought, instead of spoiling the play. It was the quickest way. I was getting embarrassed with my own joke."

"You are a brick, too, my seventeenth cousin!" he said. "No harm done, as you have told nobody else."

"Oh, but I have!" She could not help letting the truth go. "I told Henriette."

"Oh!" Phil was thoughtful. "What did she say?"

"To tell you—that is—I mean, the sense of it—that she was not acting by proxy in such matters."

"Naturally not," he replied. "However, she knows," he concluded.

"All's well that ends well," said Helen.

"Yes."

It was on her tongue's end to tell him of her resolution to go to America, but she changed her mind instantly and finally. She would not ask his help, not after this affair under the tree. And she would start to-morrow. She would not, could not, spend another day at Mervaux. The resolution had occupied her in a moment of silence. Awakening from it, she saw that he had turned as one drawn by something of intense interest and was gazing out across the fields. Far away on the horizon was a flash and another flash and then many flashes. It was like sheet lightning.

"There must be a storm in the distance!" she exclaimed.

"Listen!" he said sharply.

From that direction came a sound like thunder,

yet not like thunder, for its dull peals had a booming regularity.

"And there—where my finger points!"

She stepped a little behind him and looked along his arm. Beyond the fingers' end, breaking out of the mantle of night, were one-two-three-four bright, sharp flashes in regular succession, followed by reports, one-two-three-four.

"Listen!"

There was a rumble of wheels on the main road, mingled with the shouts of men, very audible once one's mind was centred on it.

"The near, sharp flashes are from the French guns! The others are the burst of shells! They are fighting there—there in sight of us!" Helen exclaimed, gripping Phil's arm. "The war has come to Mervaux! This will be terrible for mother! We must be careful how we break the news to her."

"Yes, she must go," said Phil. "Wait!"

He was straining his eyes at something which she could not see. Finally she made out a moving, lumpish sort of procession coming from the road. As it drew nearer she recognised it as a battery of guns, which stopped behind a clump of woods in a hollow. She heard the commands and saw the groups of horses swing round and then go to the rear.

"I'll speak to them. Perhaps they can tell us what to expect," said Phil.

"Shan't I go with you? My French may help."

"Yes, that's so. Shall I never forget that everybody doesn't speak English and that only the English really understand my French?"

Together they walked across the dewy fields till an officer of the battery flashed his electric pocket lamp in their faces, as he stepped from among his men busy emplacing the *soixante-quinze* for action.

"Monsieur! What is your business here? Who are you?" he asked.

"I am an American stopping at the chateau over there and this is my cousin," Phil managed to say in his school French.

"His accent is not German, you will agree, *mon capitaine!*" put in Helen.

"Nor yours, but Parisian, Mademoiselle!" He was very polite, but the voice was tired. "You had better go back to the chateau and stay, lest your purpose be misunderstood. We are very sharp about such things in war time."

"How is it going?" They asked the question together; the question of all France.

"It is not for an artilleryman to say; but if I were you and you have the means I'd get away—not that the Germans may come here, but there may be shell-fire. If you remain and there is shelling, go into the cellar. And don't alarm the villagers. They glut the road with their carts."

"You are very kind. Good luck for France!"

"For France! *Au revoir, Monsieur!*"

The two cousins were startled by the crashes of a salvo from the battery before they were halfway back to the chateau grounds.

CHAPTER XIII

A MATTER OF GALLANTRY

AFTER Helen had left the room, Henriette staring at the closed door suddenly swept toward it and swung it half open, only to shut it with a bang. Doubtfully she turned, then sprang to the window as if to call Helen back. She had a glimpse of her sister on the path, but again her impulse was arrested.

Now she sat down on the edge of the bed, pressed her fingers to her temples, and for a while was motionless except for the restless tapping of her foot on the floor. At length her hands dropped to her side, the tapping ceased and, with a shrug of her shoulders, she rose, turned on the lights and looked at herself in the mirror, where she had always found the solution of the few problems that had ever vexed her. As reassuring this in her present mood as for the miser to find his gold still there when he opens his strong box upon returning from a journey. She smiled at the mirror and the mirror smiled back, and she allowed herself a prolonged, luxurious sigh.

In the cup of valley where the chateau was

hidden, surrounded by walls of trees, the sound of the distant artillery duel was inaudible; but the sharp blasts of the *soixante-quinze* from behind the clump of woods prevented any second sigh. She flew to the window. Outside the silence of the night and again that unmistakable sound. She leaned against the casement for support, trembling.

Madame Ribot, also looking into a mirror, had also sprung to the window and also leaned against the casement in a convulsion of trembling. At almost the same instant mother and daughter, such was their likeness of nature, recovered their volition in the demand for companionship in danger. Even with men it is largely the herd instinct which makes armies brave. The two women met on the landing and involuntarily clasped each other's hands, and the fact of being together took the tremor out of their limbs. Madame Ribot became articulate. It was her duty as the elder, the parent, to show initiative.

"Where is Cousin Phil?" she asked.

"Out in the grounds."

"And Helen?"

"With him."

There was reassurance to her strictly feminine mind in the utterance of that masculine pronoun. The guns were silent for the time being; out of doors was only the moist stillness of night.

"We must find them," said Madame Ribot, starting down the stairs.

As they reached the sitting-room the battery began a vicious spasm of drum-head fire. Madame Ribot grasped the nearest thing to steady herself, which was the table. She broke into a petulant rage which defied her fears with the truth of her heart.

"Truckleford! That's it! There's no war in England. Truckleford and the bore of an old parson and his wife! I have nothing to do with this beastly war. Why couldn't they keep it away from Mervaux?"

"Yes, Truckleford!" assented Henriette.

"If we can get there," continued her mother. "We don't know what may happen. The Germans are blowing chateaux and villages to pieces. If we can get there! Why doesn't Helen come? Doesn't that cousin know we are here alone? He probably thinks all this is another spectacle for an American tourist."

The firing ceased as suddenly as it had begun, her words sounding shrewish in the silence and uttered in the face of Phil and Helen as they entered together. Phil was smiling in a way that was helpful and Helen's manner was that of the elation of a great experience.

"It must have been awful for you, not knowing what it all meant and coming so suddenly!" she said, at sight of her mother's drawn features.

Briefly she told what the battery commander had said; and then naturally, for the first time in her life, became the family leader. "The thing is for everybody to pack," she added, "and I'll find out about the trains and getting a cart to the station."

"Yes, the government takes all the horses and the trains and even then they can't stop the Germans!" Madame Ribot complained.

"At least you will let me look up the starting time," Phil urged. "I know enough French for that."

"You could not ask without alarming the village," she replied. "I know whom to go to for a conveyance."

Further concern on this score was abated by the arrival of two gallants, neck and neck, for Count de la Grange and General Rousseau, breathless, reached the chateau together. They addressed themselves to Madame Ribot in characteristic fashion; the General as became a soldier, the Count as became the old *noblesse* come to the succour of a lady in distress.

"The French army will hold," said the General. "We are only drawing the Germans on; but being in the sphere of operations, it will not be comfortable for you here and, though you are in no danger, I think an early departure advisable."

"The government has left Paris," said the

Count, not failing to appear important, "as I have just learned through trustworthy sources." (The station master had told him.)

"Politicians! Cravens!" growled the General.

"What does one expect from a republic?" demanded the Count.

"I have served both the republic and the empire, but I always served France!" replied the General. "The army will hold. Madame Ribot, pack such things as you need. Rest perfectly assured. I am at your service."

"And I shall have my trap here to take you to the first train. It goes at seven," said the Count, with a side glance of triumph at the General, who had no conveyance. "I have some influence and I shall see that you have a place—and I shall drive you myself."

Madame Ribot, completely reassured, gratified that she had not taken down her hair for the night and not unconscious that a dressing-gown became her well, smiled at the Count with a charming gratitude.

"You take it all so calmly, Madame, as I knew you would," he said. "Like a true Frenchwoman. It is women who are brave, not men."

The General was tugging at his moustache. Thanks to one dilapidated old trap, he who had led charges in '70 and fought from Gravelotte to Paris was holding a small hand; but he was still

a strategist, who now had a Napoleonic flash of initiative.

"Madame, while as a soldier I think there is no danger," he said, "I feel it my duty to remain at the chateau over-night, so that you will know I am near in case there should be an unexpected crisis which in time of war only a soldier knows how to face. I shall take forty winks on the sofa here as I have done many times in my tent on campaign. Ah, those days! And you will find me here in the morning," he concluded, turning triumphantly to the Count.

Ever impartial, Madame Ribot now bestowed her smile on the General.

"But Madame is not afraid," put in the Count. "I fear she will take your offer, General, as an indication that she is."

"On the contrary," said Madame Ribot, "it takes crises like this to prove what good neighbours one has. You have assured my reaching the station"—with a smile to the Count—"and you have assured that some one is on guard," with a smile to the General.

"But you will have to pack, you forget that, *mon general!*" the *noblesse* remarked to the army, with extreme politeness.

"I pack! I go!" the General snorted. "I shall not let the Germans drive me from my house!" he said. "I remain! I know that the army will hold!"

"And I shall see Madame safely to Paris, feeling that a Frenchman can serve France best not with the Germans but with the French," remarked the Count pithily.

"Sometimes a soldier too old to fight can serve in other ways," replied the General.

"Madame, I am sorry that it is to be at such an early hour," the Count concluded, as he kissed Madame Ribot's hand and withdrew. The General also kissed it; and Madame Ribot, quite stately, ascended to her room.

"We also must pack," said Henriette to Helen.

They, too, went upstairs and left America and the French army together.

"A fine woman, Madame Ribot!" said the General. "Ah, our guns! Hear them! Our guns—and I a gouty old man—a bag of bones! But this old heart," he placed his hand over it, "has all the desire it ever had."

"You can see the guns from the upper terrace," suggested Phil.

"Come on, then, Monsieur," exclaimed the General. "You will forgive me," he added, as they started up the path, "for intruding myself when there was already a man here, a young, self-reliant man, as I see you are. But that pestiferous Count!" he exclaimed belligerently; then he chuckled philosophically. "Ah, he and I play a game which pleases Madame and pleases us, we who live on memory—though she need not

if she were not so selfish. I do not like to allow the Count to score—it makes him so jealous when you score off him. Then, one must be amused in the country when time hangs idle on the hands and one grows old.”

The great main road was now dark with transport and infantry under the moonlight, and across the fields squadron of cavalry could be seen going at the trot. Every gun-flash near and far, every movement, had its message for General Rousseau. He talked of '70, ran on in reminiscence as he stared out into the night; and finally was silent, as if a great weight had been laid on his heart. Phil understood that the signs which the old soldier read were not good.

“They are the lucky ones, our officers and men who are fighting,” he said. “It’s so simple—fighting! You forget everything. You do your all for France. I was twice wounded, Monsieur. All night I crawled and hid in a barn till I got stronger; and then I worked my way through the German lines and fought till I was too weak to stand in the siege. Yes, that was good—so simple!”

Was it to be '70 over again? His army, his France to submit to the old fate? A second and final tragedy coming?

“Yes, yes—and,” said the General, a new note in his voice, as if an inspiration had come to him, “and I may still serve not only France, but you in

America—all democracy, all civilisation. Monsieur, you will tell Madame Ribot if she does not see me again that I had to look after an important affair. I am going to locate some commander of ours who will pass me onto the staff. Yes, tell Madame that I kiss her hand."

His old legs seemed to have found new life as he parted from Phil.

CHAPTER XIV.

"IF I WISH IT!"

WHEN the two sisters went upstairs, Henriette turned to go to her room, then whirled and followed Helen.

"Well, did you tell him?" she demanded, with a kind of ferocity.

"Yes," replied Helen, foreseeing fresh torture.

"And how did he take it?"

"In the mood that I gave it—good-naturedly, as a joke."

"Oh, a joke! Yes, a joke!" Henriette played on the word harshly. "He did not renew the proposal to you? Strange!" she laughed. "And did you tell him that you had told me?"

The question was so piercingly put that Helen recoiled slightly.

"Yes," she said.

"Another joke, that! Did you think of the position it put me in?"

"But he asked me. I could not lie to him!"

"No, never! You could not lie!" Henriette rejoined. "No, you did not think what kind of a position it put me in—or him. I know that he

has meant to propose to me. He knows that I know. Delightful situation! Acting for me, did you say that I would accept or refuse?"

"I said nothing. He said nothing."

"Quite nothing?" Henriette persisted. "Nothing about poor, little, plain, much-abused sisters?"

"No. I don't know what you mean, Henriette. The war is here. We are both on our nerves. And—he will propose again. He loves you."

Henriette smiled with something of her usual sweetness, touched with a bantering acidity.

"If I wish it!" she said, turning abruptly to go.

"Henriette, please not to-night! We don't know what may happen to-morrow," Helen pleaded.

"I must pack," replied Henriette rather irrelevantly, and was gone.

Irritating enough this task at all times, let alone when you may take only a small box and everything that you leave behind may fall into the hands of a conqueror. Henriette looked into the big closet at the array of gowns and the row of shoes under the drooping skirts and spread out her hands hopelessly.

"I can buy new gowns," she said. "It's the laces and jewelry and the mementoes that must go."

She unlocked an old carved chest and in turn unlocked a drawer within which was crammed full of bundles of letters, each tied with a bit of pink ribbon. There must have been a dozen bundles and she smiled at their number.

"When I am so young, too!" she mused. "Why take them? Why not leave them locked up? But the Germans might break open the chest and read them. No, they must go—at the very bottom of the trunk;" where she laid the trophies of conquest before she thought of anything else.

The firing had died down. All sense of fear had departed. After slipping into her kimono she moved about the room swiftly, gathering her most precious things. She had forgotten to draw the shade and Phil, returning from the terrace, saw her figure flitting about as he came down the path. Pausing to regard the trunk which was already giving signs of the limit of its capacity, she heard the sound of his step on the gravel. Leaning out of the window she called to him.

"Have you been out to see the battle again? I suppose you felt you might go as long as the General remains on the sofa to guard us poor, lone women!"

"He went on some errand and begged me to express his regrets if he does not see you again," Phil replied.

"My packing has gone on so fast that I am coming down and going to the terrace for a

look for myself." She gave a glance in the mirror. The kimono was good enough; it was particularly becoming, besides. "Aren't we giving you more entertainment than we promised at Mervaux?" she asked merrily, as she joined him.

"But oughtn't you to sleep?" he suggested. "Seven is a pretty early hour. There's no telling how much rest you'll get to-morrow."

"Sleep?" She looked at him, with the light of the lamp from the hall dancing in her eyes. "One must be sleepy in order to sleep."

"I see that you are not."

"Was Helen very frightened when the guns began firing?" she asked.

"Not a bit," he replied.

"Why should she be? Why should any one be?"

As they passed the dark spot under the tree where Helen had been sitting when he had stolen up behind her, mistaking her for another, it might have occurred to both that it would be an awkward stroll if the monstrous fact of the war's proximity had not dwarfed personal concerns. From the terrace they could hear the creaking of wheels on the road, though the battery behind the trees was silent. No movement of the gunners, who had dropped asleep in exhaustion. In the distance were still occasional flashes. Hundreds of thousands of men were moving over

there under cover of darkness or sleeping on the dew-moist fields before the morrow's action.

"And one does not know when one will ever be here again," she said.

"The portrait unfinished, too," he suggested.

"Yes. What a happy time we have had doing it!" she exclaimed.

"You had, too?" he asked.

"Of course I had. And we are going to finish it, aren't we, cousin, at Truckleford? Won't you come there?"

She put her hand on his arm with a slight pressure—a cousinly privilege. The moonlight was strong enough to make her features visible; the dark hair and brows, the shining eyes and the smiling lips. She was very beautiful, unreally so, there in the moonlight. She knew and he knew that she knew what had happened three hours ago, before the war had come to Mervaux. Her hand was still on his arm. He took it in his and she did not protest.

"Yes! How could I resist?" he exclaimed.
"I——"

"Agreed! You've promised!" she cried triumphantly, giving his hand a shake and drawing away. "Now to finish the infernal trunk and on to Truckleford!"

"Isn't there some packing I can do?" he asked when they reached the house. "I feel utterly helpless."

"Nothing, unless you can put more gowns into my trunk than I can," she replied.

"But all the bric-à-brac and your pictures! I can put them in closets and lock the door. And the china, too!"

But Jacqueline already had this in hand.

"I'll help you!" said Phil.

"Come on, then," said the businesslike Jacqueline. "We need a man who can fetch and carry."

"And who'll obey orders, I see. I await your commands."

"And I'll join you later!" called Henriette.

CHAPTER XV

HELEN ASKS A FAVOUR

THE glow of satisfaction which Madame Ribot had enjoyed during the gallantries of the General and the Count soon passed when she was behind the scenes. Between directions to the maid and continual changes of mind as to what she would and would not have packed, she scolded the war.

"Why couldn't the *préfect* or the army authorities have told us in time, so we could have got away like Christians?" she grumbled. "Wasn't it their business to know that the Germans were coming? It's shameful, indecent, barbarous! Well?"—this last irritably in answer to a rap at her door. "Come in!"

When she saw that it was Helen her frown deepened. It was a petulant frown which would have surprised the Count and the General; yet, perhaps it would not. They were wise old men, particularly the General.

"More bad news?" exclaimed Madame Ribot. She had been used to regarding Helen as a har-binger of bad news since her birth. "It must be! You look as if you regarded the whole thing as

a lark. Of course you would. Everything goes by contraries with you!" she continued. "Well?"

Helen was elate, despite the scene with Henriette; elate with decision.

"I came to ask a favour," she said. It was hardly a diplomatic beginning, considering her mother's state of mind.

"A favour! At this time! That is like you, too."

"Some one ought to look after the house while we are gone," Helen went on hurriedly.

"Jacqueline—and the mayor and the curé. What do we have officials and priests for?"

"I meant myself, too."

"You? I should not call that a favour. You mean to be here alone when the Germans come?"

"I don't think they will harm me," said Helen soberly.

Madame Ribot gave her daughter a sweeping look, which was cuttingly significant.

"No, not you!" she exclaimed; and noting the two red spots which appeared in Helen's cheeks she added: "You know how to look after yourself."

Her mother's thought so quickly comprehended had cut deep, but only for an instant. Then it gave urgency to her desire. Her words came panting, as if she were striving for a goal.

"Mother, it's my chance—the chance that

comes only once! You see, I am what I am and this is the thing that I want to do. I'll see real war and the soldiers and the villagers in the midst of it—and the Germans, too! Oh, how I can draw! I'll not need to be clever, the subject is so great." The daughter's intensity communicated its directness to the mother. "It will not be necessary to say a word to Henriette or Cousin Phil, or anybody about the plan," she went on. "You see, I shall start to walk to the station. You will all be aboard, the train will go and I shall be left behind."

But Helen's self-reliant precision was too valuable. Madame Ribot did not like to part with it in such a crisis.

"And desert me when I need you! What kind of a mother do you think I am to permit such an arrangement as this?"

"The Count will see you safely on the train to Paris and I can finish packing all your things and put them in the garret under lock and key, and you will return to find nothing disturbed."

Madame Ribot's glance followed Helen's around the litter of clothing on the floor.

"Really, one of us ought to stay and look after the things!" Helen urged. "Please!"

"Very well. Do, my dear!" her mother agreed.

She breathed a sigh of relief, and Helen drew a deep breath which filled the depths of her eyes

with the triumph of freedom from the memory of the scene under the tree and of more things than her mind could catalogue. Even Madame Ribot was susceptible to the glory of those eyes. It occurred to her that Helen did have moments when she was not plain.

"Thank you, mother!" she said. "I—I——" and she caught her mother's hands in hers and kissed her on the forehead. "And not a word to anybody!"

The desire for movement which always came to her when she was happy called for the open. She did not know where she should go, but somewhere out into the night under the stars, in sight of the gun-flashes. Below, she found Phil and Jacqueline gathering bric-à-brac and china and wrapping it in papers and putting it in a chest.

"You're through packing?" Phil asked.

"Quite ready," said Helen. He was the one person she did not want to meet.

"Then sleep for you! No telling whether you'll get any to-morrow."

"I could not—not to-night!" The joy of her decision still remained in her eyes and her exclamation sounded a vitality that seemed to live on itself.

"In that case, Jacqueline and I will welcome an assistant," said he.

She could hardly go moon-gazing when there was something to do, so she joined in their task.

They rolled up rugs; they took down Henriette's pictures and put all in a closet, which was locked when it was full to overflowing. It was strange doing this when she would be there to-morrow, and stranger still working with him in view of what had happened. At length it became oppressive, even torturing in its fellowship of talk and laughter. For she found herself laughing a number of times when their glances met as he passed her something and she relied on his masculine strength and he on her deftness of fingers in their work.

"Enough! There's little left that the Germans can harm. I really believe I could sleep now!" she exclaimed.

"We can lie down for a couple of hours, anyway," he said.

They went upstairs together and parted at the landing.

"Good-night—or is it good-morning?" he said.

"Good-morning!" she answered. For an instant of silence both seemed arrested as they looked at each other; then Helen turned abruptly toward her room.

CHAPTER XVI

A CHANGE OF PLANS

COUNT DE LA GRANGE was in the yard with his trap and a peasant's cart for the baggage soon after dawn. He was fretting a little lest his passengers should be late, but relieved to find that the General was absent.

"There will be a crush. All the village knows. Everybody is trying to get away," he said.

Jacqueline had coffee ready and insisted that they must take it before they started. Madame Ribot wore a veil and had too much powder on her face; but nothing was lacking in hers or the Count's manners. Not until he had helped her into the trap, and they were well started on the way, did it occur to any one to ask where Helen was.

"She is walking to the station," said Madame Ribot, with ready ease, "as she wanted to see some one in the village."

"It is the last train," said the Count, "but I told the station master not to say so to the public or the station might be mobbed. I have the tickets. Though I've been up all night I feel quite fresh."

"I knew that I could depend upon you, even if the General did not come," Madame Ribot assured him.

"I wonder where the General is?" remarked the Count, confidentially flicking the venerable horse with the whip and holding the reins in the manner of one driving a four-in-hand.

"He had other business, I was told," said Madame Ribot casually.

At that moment, indeed, the General was concerned with whether it was better to put a basket of carrier pigeons under his bed or in a closet off the kitchen, and this old soldier of France was little concerned with any rivalry with the Count or with Madame Ribot's affairs. He had forgotten their existence.

It was well that the Count had the tickets or he could hardly have got past the crowd of old men and women and children and their belongings in every kind of portmanteau or knotted in handkerchiefs, towels and sheets, and well that he had influence with the station master which took the party onto the platform before the others. Places were found in the train for Madame Ribot and Henriette to sit down, while the Count and Phil stood, with bundles and children around their legs.

"But Helen has not come!" exclaimed Phil.

"Nor will she!" said Madame Ribot, weary and irritated. She had not risen before nine for

many years and loathed travelling even in a first-class compartment alone, to say nothing of the present disgustingly crowded conditions. "Her walking to the station was a ruse. She is going to remain at Mervaux to look after our things."

"Alone, with the Germans coming?" Phil demanded. He also showed signs of irritation to match hers.

"She begged to," Madame Ribot explained. "Some one ought to stay, and she said it would give her subjects for her drawings."

"A fine courage, but——"

Already the station master was ringing his bell. Phil dragged his bag from under the seat and sprang out onto the platform.

"I'll bring her by the next train!" he called.

"There will be no next train!" put in the Count.

"At any rate, she must not be left alone to receive the German army!"

"Perhaps she doesn't want you!" put in Henriette, rising and leaning out of the window in protest. "I wouldn't. It's Helen's own idea and I know Helen. Come to Paris with us!"

"No, I'm going to Mervaux to see the Germans!" Phil replied promptly.

Henriette gave her mother a swift glance, then one at Phil.

"If Helen, why not I?" she exclaimed.

"But——" gasped Madame Ribot. She half rose, put out her hand to arrest Henriette who had taken up her own bag, but was jerked back to her seat by the motion of the starting train.

"To Mervaux, now we've seen you safe on your way!" said Henriette. "It's what I wanted to do all the time."

She passed her bag to Phil and held out her hand to him as he ran beside the train. He caught her literally in his arms as she whirled around when she alighted, and she was smiling up into his eyes with adventure's call in her own after she was firm on her feet, her face close to his.

"Thank you, cousin! Well done!" she murmured.

Madame Ribot had collapsed, her head bent, her hands drooped in her lap.

"We are off! You need have no worries now, Madame," said the Count. "No army can travel as fast as a railroad train."

But she did not hear him and was all unconscious of her surroundings. Just one thing was clear in her mind: the look that Henriette had given Phil when she made her decision. The mother and probably she alone, though a thousand people had looked on, would have recognised its meaning. The thing had come and in the way she had dreaded. She who had relived her youth in her daughter had seen the last chapter of her

own story reflected in the feature which she had most dreaded. She had flirted with many men without more than a flutter of the heart and so had Henriette. Then she had fallen in love suddenly, without reason, and in headstrong insistence had married, to repent afterward.

One cause alone had sent Henriette back to Mervaux: the man who was returning there in order that Helen should not be alone. After all the chances she had had and played with, Henriette, too, had acted without reason when the impulse came. Helen was to blame. It was partly jealousy with Henriette, as it had been with Madame Ribot; the desire for conquest baffled by some humbler person. Her daughter was "running after" this cousin from America who had nothing to offer except America; but so had she herself run after a man who, at least, was not poor.

Back with Phil in face of all the proprieties which Madame Ribot held in such esteem in her later years! All her hopes and plans ruined! It was wicked, ungrateful, shameful—and due to the damnable war. But she had done her best for Henriette. Why worry? She had to live. She had had no sleep. She was in a wretched state and she must look a hundred years old. Worry made wrinkles. Her conscience was clear and—yes, she had to live. Experience was the only

teacher. Henriette would have to repent at leisure as she herself had done.

"You arranged it all wonderfully," she said, as she looked up with one of her choice smiles to the Count.

"Madame, the object of my service made it a delight?" said the Count.

He tried to arrange the baggage to give her feet more freedom and at the same time to keep from twitching from twinges of gout. He felt twice as old as Madame Ribot.

Back in his little house the General, who had decided to keep the pigeons under his bed, felt as young as he had at Gravelotte. Such is the way of war.



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CHAPTER XVII

UNDER FIRE

YES, an awkward business, this, of a man and two girl cousins in a country house. Phil was sensible of it as he started to walk back from the station with Henriette, carrying her bag and his own.

"We have Jacqueline," she said, as if divining what was in his mind. "A most dependable person, Jacqueline. Mother is quite safe and we shall see the war. Besides, we simply could not leave Helen alone."

Coming to the top of a rise they stopped short. The steady thunder of the guns became suddenly audible and against the green background of distant woods little puffs of smoke that seemed born of nothing were breaking and spreading into a mist which was as innocent-looking as a fleecy cloud on a summer day.

"One cannot realise what is going on there," remarked Phil, "though we shall if it comes to us."

"Then we go into the cellar, don't we, and wait?"

"I believe that is the rule," he said. "You've a good spirit."

"That is easy when a woman has a man along whom she can rely upon," she replied cheerfully. "We have not been used to having a man at Mervaux."

When they entered the house they found that Helen was still absent. Jacqueline did not know where she had gone.

"I suppose the first thing is to settle down again," said Henriette.

Phil took her bag upstairs. When he returned to the sitting-room Helen was just entering.

"You!" she exclaimed. "I——" and she paused, no words coming to her. When she had thought that the house, the world, and the battle were hers came this intrusion by the one person whom she did not wish to see again! She ought to welcome him and she could not break silence.

"We could not let you remain here alone when we heard that you were going to stay," he explained. "In fact, could you expect any decent cousin to do otherwise?" he added.

Her eyes which had been stonily dull gave their first signal. It was smiling mischief, which developed into one or her laughs.

"It was such a surprise that I must have looked as if I were seeing ghosts," she said. "It's a tribute to Jacqueline's omelets. You see, I relied

on them to keep the Germans from looting the house. I meant to meet the invader with an omelet instead of an olive branch."

She carried the part off well once she was started, leaving him puzzled and wishing that she would continue her mood—any mood that livened her features.

"Oh, I didn't think I could stand at the door and defy the German hosts!" he explained. "Only, being a man, well—I——"

"You were going to play the masculine part of protector. I do feel more safe. Any woman must, being a woman and subject to conventional sex inheritances"—this with a trifle of condescension, which was shattered by utter astonishment as Henriette appeared.

"I did not mean to make you jump out of your shoes," said Henriette.

"Mother was aboard the train all right?" Helen asked.

"Yes; quite."

"Did she want you to come back, too?"

"No. What kind of a sister did you think I was, you brave, foolish Helen? Did you think I would go to Paris and leave you here?"

She had slipped her arm around Helen's waist with a rallying burst of affection, which concluded with a kiss and a nestling of her cheek against Helen's as she looked at Phil. The two faces were close together, Henriette smiling devotedly

and Helen quite still in contrast; the one at her best and the other at her worst. Then Helen looked around at her sister studiously and back at Phil.

"I'm glad you both came," she said. "I— is there another train to Paris?" she asked abruptly.

"No, that was the last," Phil answered.

"So we are here together, come what will," she said slowly, with an odd emphasis. "I just came back for my drawing things. The French are retreating along the road and the German shells are coming nearer. I can't afford to waste a minute."

She took up her drawing materials from the table. As she turned to leave the room, something in her attitude made Phil arrest her.

"You are not going into danger?"

"No, not in the least; to sketch is all," she replied.

"I think that my part is to keep watch of you," he said. "May I go with you?"

"And I want to see, too!" Henriette put in.

"Come on, then. If you are going to look after us both we must not be separated," said Helen.

She walked ahead, however, leaving them to follow. From the terrace they cut across the fields behind the battery. Its commander was too busy to pay any attention to them and the rider with the caissons galloping over the field with more shells,

careening and slewing as the knowing hands guided the horses, did not give even passing notice to the young man and two young women.

Helen dropped on the ground with her back to a shock of wheat and began to sketch the battery. She was in action no less than the gunners of the *soixante-quinze*, whom she made live in lines drawn by her swift fingers on white paper. Phil, unable to tell what was the gunners' target or which if any of the white balls of smoke in the distance were made by the screaming messengers they sent, looked around at her and it seemed quite in keeping that she should be present, her shoulders drawn in, her lips moving, as she sketched, with Phil and Henriette in the rôle of spectators.

"Now for the road!" she said, rising.

There, mistily through the dust, blue coats and red trousers showed in a moving stream to the rear between intervals of transport. The guns had had something of the splendour of war, but not these weary men leaving the soil of France behind to the enemy, beards from four weeks' campaigning white and brown with dust, eyes sunken, feet hobbling and sore, plodding on to the rear.

From this point of high ground a small town was visible in another lap of the hills, where French towns prefer to lie snug from the wind. The air was clear; sound carried far. A scream

different from that of the shells from the mouth of French guns was heard; a scream that came toward them and ended in a crash, as if a steel ball had split into fragments, as it had. Over the house-tops of the town rose a cloud of dust and black smoke. Then another, and, sound traveling slower than sight, they again heard the rush of the projectile and its burst. Henriette gripped Phil's arm, but said nothing.

An officer of infantry looked around and nodded at the burst over the town in understanding. He spoke to an old colonel with white moustache who seemed asleep on his horse. The colonel shook his head as much as to say that there was no danger; that nothing could reach them at that range.

Helen had not seen the bursts in the town. She was trying to get the old colonel, the wounded men on the tops of wagons, the wounded on foot, in lines which should tell of the meaning of retreat in the suggestiveness of types.

"I'm not sure that we ought to remain here," said Phil.

"Why not?" asked Helen.

He pointed to the bursting shells.

"Oh, I couldn't go away!" was her only response.

Then the pencil dropped from her hand. Phil ducked as instinctively as if some one had struck the back of his neck and Henriette clung close to

him with a cry of terror, for that approaching scream which had been distant was coming straight for them in the growing volume of a horror that froze the marrow. All the men on the road struck for one side or the other, their ducking forms flashing immutably on the retina of the eye in that awful second before a cloud of earth and dust spouted from an explosion on the other side of the road.

They were still alive. It was miraculous that they should be when they had died a score of deaths in that second. Helen tried to pick up her pencil and Henriette moaned: this much of an impression before the second shell came. It was nearer; death this time, without doubt. But it burst a hundred yards in front of them and some fragments whizzed by their ears.

Phil looked around for cover; for anything which would give them some protection. There was nothing near except wheat shocks. He swung Henriette around on the other side of him from the direction of the shells and called out to lie down. He could think of nothing else unless they ran. But which way should they run? The next burst was between them and the house; the next on the other side of the road. That was four. He remembered that batteries had four guns and fired in salvos. The target was evidently the road and the thing to do, then, must be to get away from the road.

"Run for it!" he cried. "That gully!"

Helen sprang up. Henriette tried to rise and could not. She was numbed with terror. Her eyes in mortal appeal spoke her helplessness. He was almost glad of this. It made him seem of some use as a masculine being in face of this hellish burst of destruction, which made unarmed men as feeble as a fly under a hammer. He did the natural thing, picked her up in his arms. She seemed very light, very yielding and trembling and strangely pale, beautiful, and trusting.

"Hurry on, Helen! I'll keep up with you, I'm so scared!" he called.

His voice sounded quite merry, as he meant it should. What travesty! He wished that he were back in Longfield or Mexico, anywhere than in that particular portion of France which a German battery was pounding. Other figures were running, too. The world seemed full of skurrying figures. Flight was the fashion.

More screams, ending in explosions, and with every one the figure in his arms trembled. But each scream was farther behind them as they hurried on. When he reached the gully he laid his burden on the grass at the bottom of it. If the target were the road they ought to be safe. At least, he could take a minute to decide what next to do. He looked back toward the road and saw the soldiers forming line in the fields under the direction of their officers. The old colonel

sitting erect on his horse still remained beside the road, shouting his commands. A black cloud hid him and when it cleared away he and the horse were gone and there was a hole in the road where they had been. Then a crack overhead drew Phil's attention from the road. There was a whizzing through the air and little spurts of dust rose from the earth, and over all a puff of smoke like those he had seen in the distance against the green hills. Phil understood that this was shrapnel and the other which burst in the earth was a high explosive.

What next? The gully was not long. Should he attempt another run? But a shrapnel bursting over the other end of the gully made him hesitate. The two girls were hugging the bank and he dropped down beside Henriette, who caught his hand in hers, trembling again with new fear. Helen was lying face downward, holding fast to her portfolio. She looked toward him and in her eyes was the mischievous challenge and on her lips was playing the same humour he had seen across the table at Truckleford.

"Now don't you wish you had gone on to Paris?" she asked.

"Not unless you came," he answered. "Look there!"

Another high explosive had burst, and where they had been sitting beside the road a rising column of smoke showed a hole.

"I—I——" whispered Henriette, and her eyes spoke what her lips could not.

But was the road the target? Another scream straight for them and again they thought: "This is death!" The explosion twenty or thirty yards short of the gully covered them with dust. A human something, red and blue, half rolled, half tumbled down the bank at their feet and lay there inert, stunned. A gash showed on the soldier's cheek and his hand reached for his arm where the torn flesh was trickling red. With the other he fumbled instinctively for a first field dressing.

Here was something positive to do. Phil, who had envied the cool officers directing their men in the preoccupation of action, tore down the sleeve and opened the dressing. There was silence now; no screams in the air; no explosions. Yes, utter silence had settled over the field except for the officer's commands. Drops of blood fell from the soldier's cheek on Phil's hands as he applied the first aid and Henriette's fingers were aimlessly hovering about trying to assist.

"You are a good spirit, Mademoiselle," said the soldier, happy in the realisation of life and the cessation of the shell-fire.

"Yes, Henriette," Phil added.

"I will go on," said the soldier, scrambling to his feet. "It is nothing."

"But are you strong enough?" Phil protested.

"I was not hit in the legs. A little farther along the road I'll get on a wagon," he said. "And you, Monsieur, you and the ladies run to the nearest cellar. That one has fainted, Monsieur—and thank you!" He was gone.

Phil turned to see Helen prostrate, her head on her portfolio. But she recovered herself as he started toward her, looking up at him vaguely; then with a surge of vitality and a gesture of disgust she sat up.

"It was the sight of blood," she said. "I could not bear that. I'm very ashamed, but quite all right, now," she concluded, with a toss of her head and a smile.

"I helped dress his wound, poor fellow!" Henriette murmured.

CHAPTER XVIII

A RUN FOR IT

PHIL leapt up the side of the gully, with a view to finding which was the safest and quickest way back to the chateau. The scene before him, so clear in its meaning even to his unknowing civilian eye, held his attention for the instant to the exclusion of his object. Those little moving spots coming over a hill this side of the town, scattering under puffs of shrapnel, must be the French rearguard; and the shells from the battery behind the woods bursting over the hill beyond must be aimed at German infantry. To the end of the gully and then sharp to the right across the open was the best route for the chateau.

"And for us it is double quick, before we get more shells!" he called to the girls as he dropped back into the gully and gave his hand to Henriette to assist her to rise. Helen was already on her feet, quite herself again.

"As they say in America, we must beat it!" she exclaimed.

So they ran to the end of the gully and then across the field. The German guns seemed to

have lost interest in that part of the world. They stopped on the terrace by common impulse, so keen is curiosity when danger seems out of reach but is still at large within view; the girls breathless and flushed and Phil with that indescribable relief of a man who has been under fire with women and sees them safely out of it. Of course they were only comparatively safe. They were within the range of many guns and at any minute that a German commander would choose, another tornado would break over their heads.

The French could be seen still more distinctly now, trickling over the landscape in retreat, in and out of the cover of valleys and woods, with puffs of shrapnel smoke in vicious pursuit. It all seemed like some game, until another one of those hideous screams ended in a crash in front of the woods that hid the French battery. The next was in the woods. This was enough to tell the battery commander that his hiding-place was located. In a race with death, the battery horses galloped up and away went the guns, with the German shells smashing the emplacements which had just been vacated. But the tenacious, skilful gunners did not go far—only behind the next ridge, where they began again to pour death into the advancing German infantry.

"I thought so!" came a voice breaking in upon the little group. "Nobody is so foolhardy as a woman!" said General Rousseau, shaking his

finger at Helen and Henriette. "When I heard that you were staying behind I came at once to warn you. That is not fireworks out there; it's death. Any minute it may be turned on these woods or on the chateau. Your place is the cellar, both of you, till this is over, do you hear?" he thundered, "or I'll take my stick to you!" He was so peremptory that Henriette turned to go, but Helen hesitated.

"And you, too, Mademoiselle!" he commanded.

"Attention! About face! March!" said Helen, saluting and clicking her heels together.

"Promise me you will not go wandering about the village making sketches till all firing is stopped!"

"My business is making sketches, not making promises!" replied Helen.

"You——" The General made for her threateningly with his stick and she ran on down the path.

"This was her doing, sticking on here, wasn't it?" asked the General. "I've known her, Monsieur, since she was a child," he added thoughtfully.

Professional instinct crowded her out of mind as he swept the field with '70 field glasses which were slung over his shoulder.

"No rout—an orderly retreat!" he said. "We are not beaten. Joffre having failed to

bar the way in Belgium is going to fight on the Marne. I have seen our corps commander and talked to him. Oh, it was very fortunate to find that I knew him. He was one of my lieutenants when I was a captain. I'm very happy, Monsieur, for I feel that I still serve—yes, serve France!”

“I wish I could!” exclaimed Phil. “It hurts to see those blue coats and red trousers coming back; but I don't believe they will go far.”

“Then you are for France! I am glad! But only a Frenchman can know how a Frenchman is for France!”

A shrapnel broke over the woods, its bullets slithering through the leaves.

“We had better see if those young women have gone into the cellar,” said the General. Another shrapnel crashed its ugly message even nearer, a fragment striking at his feet. “Women are the very devil under fire,” he added. “They will never take cover. A soldier considers it duty. Now if that does not send them into the cellar,” he continued, as a heavy reverberation came from the direction of the village, “they have no sense at all. You have young legs. Run on and look after them.”

Phil found it no effort to run; his only regret was that he could not fly.

“Never did have much respect for shell-fire!” mumbled the General. “I hope they don't

hit my pigeons. I'd better go home and look after them."

He walked on at a dignified pace, while the shells continued to burst over the woods and occasional high explosives in the village. Phil met him at the door of the house and reported:

"Your orders are obeyed, sir. They are in the cellar."

"Excellent!"

"And they have sent orders to you. You are to come into the cellar, too, sir!"

"I must look after my pigeons. I never had much respect for shell-fire——" He stopped short, struck by a thought. "If I were hit it would be just as serious as if my pigeons were hit. I——"

"Quite so!" put in Phil. He had taken a liking to the General, whom war, to his mind, had transformed from a gallant old fustbudget of a beau to a brave and simple gentleman.

"You have guessed my secret—the secret of my pigeons?" gasped the General in alarm.

"Have I? Yes, I'm afraid I have, and I——" Something caught in his throat as he looked into the piercing grey eyes of the General. "I hope you know that the secret is safe."

"I do. You are a man of honour and you have said that you are for France. And the only way to do my duty to France is to keep alive. I go into the cellar."

As they passed through the kitchen a pane of glass fell with a tinkling crash as a shell-fragment hit it and a saucepan rattled.

"Jacqueline will object to the Germans making omelets in her kitchen," said the General. "No one has ever appreciated Madame Ribot's cellar more than myself," he remarked as he descended the stairs. "Her wines are excellent. H-m, they are shelling the village pretty freely, though we have no troops there—a joke on the Germans."

"But the people—what of them? Are they safe? Will they know enough to take cover?" asked Helen.

"Of course," said the General.

"It's horrible to think that Mère Perigord and the children should be exposed out of ignorance!" Helen sprang past the General and up the stairs.

"This is where I intervene!" said Phil, starting after her.

"I told you women were the very devil under fire," murmured the General. "No sense of fear like men."

"And why not I?" Henriette, too, was going. But the General stopped the way.

"No, young woman," he said. "I'm looking after you and if I had been your mother——"

"You'd have spanked me!" put in Henriette, making a charming grimace and dropping back

into her seat against the wine bin. "Helen will be the death of Cousin Phil yet," she added. "She's in an awful state of nerves."

"Seems perfectly normal," remarked the General. "I've always liked Helen," he added tartly.

When Helen and Phil came out into the village street not a soul was in sight. The little community of peasants' houses with its old church was as dead as Pompeii. They went into Mère Perigord's living-room and looked into the bedroom without finding her. When Helen called down into the cellar a quavering voice answered:

"Of course, you goose, and do you go right back to your own cellar or come down here. What do you think we are—fools? Why, one goes to a cellar as naturally as one puts up an umbrella in a rain!"

The shelling had stopped when Helen and Phil reached the street again. Soon faces began to appear in the doorways and the village came to life.

"It reminds me of prairie dogs ducking for their burrows," said Phil. "I ought to explain that——"

"Oh, I know what prairie dogs are," replied Helen. "But, seriously, there is a question I want to ask." She was smiling faintly, but her eyes had a defiant spark. "Are you going to follow me wherever I go?"

"Yes, if you are in danger."

"Is that fair?" she demanded.

"It's cousinly," he replied.

"But what if Henriette and I go in different directions?" she continued methodically.

"In that case, I see that you prefer that I go with Henriette. I—I think you know better how to take care of yourself."

She flushed and looked down. It had not occurred to her whither the questions were leading.

"Yes, of course," she said.

"Then I shall follow her, unless she remains in the cellar. In that case I'll follow you."

"Very well," she assented, with a shrug; and looking up again: "I'm ashamed of myself for fainting this afternoon. It was the sight of blood. I haven't thought of that. It makes me afraid, and war means that, and I had wanted to see war."

They met the General coming out of the chateau, and Phil noted again how straight he was and how confident and happy. It was a picture of the old warrior which he was ever to remember. Indoors they found Jacqueline, now that the shell-fire had ceased, busy preparing *déjeuner*, while she abused the Germans for having dented a saucepan. War or no war, people must eat. Her business was to cook and she went about her business, French fashion. The result of being up all night and under fire, as

the General or any other old campaigner could have told them, was that the three cousins were ravenously hungry. They had a surprising sense of security, though guns and rifle-fire could be heard around them. In a few hours they had become habituated to war.

Helen was silent, thinking in pictures, the multitude of pictures that she had seen that morning. It seemed to her that she had enough material to keep her drawing for a lifetime.

"That black hole is the place where we sat beside the road," said Henriette, looking across to Phil with a grateful smile. Then she referred to the scene in the gully and spoke of how brave and cheery the wounded soldier had been, even as blood was dropping from his cheeks.

"Don't!" exclaimed Helen, with a shudder.

"Sorry, dear!" said Henriette, and changed the subject.

After exhaustion and hunger, food; and after food nature, even within sound of the guns, will assert itself on an August day. If one of the shells bursting half a mile away had burst in the garden, then nature would have yielded to nervous excitement, which may manifest itself in outward calm or in chattering teeth. In either instance, the strain is there.

"I confess to feeling sleepy," said Henriette, nodding, her long lashes drooping after the meal.

"And you, Helen?"

"Perhaps. I'd like to try."

"Then do try, both of you," said Phil. "There's no telling how much we shall be kept awake when the Germans come. And I am going to exact a promise from you," he added, as they rose from the table, "that you do not leave the house or run any further risk to-day."

"And you?" the girls exclaimed together. There was something more than the usual start of surprise on the part of both when two people find that they have the same thought and have given utterance to it. Helen slipped out of the room, leaving the scene to Henriette.

"There is no dodging those big shells," she said, "so you must agree to take care, too. You see," she lowered her lashes thoughtfully and then looked up at him with a world of frank solicitude, "as you saved my life I feel an interest in yours."

"Not to mention that I have an interest in yours!" he interjected.

"I'm glad if you feel that way," she said; then added, as he went toward her, under the spell of her beauty, "I promise! You promise!" She gave him her hand in sealing the bargain, but drew it away before his closed too tightly and smiled over her shoulder, saying, "I'm really sleepy," as she withdrew.

Phil was left with this vision of her to compare with that of her as she rested in his arms while

he carried her from the roadside to the gully. Then he marvelled once more at the situation. How long should he be here with these two cousins? What was going on out there amidst the sound of the guns? With all the world around in action, it was not in his nature to remain still.

"Jacqueline, if any more shells come," he said, putting his head in at the kitchen door, "will you see that those two girls go into the cellar and stay?"

"I'll take a saucepan to them if they don't!" Jacqueline replied. "As for you, I suppose you are going out to try to be killed, like all the other foolish men in the world," she added, without any effort to restrain him.

On reaching the terrace Phil found himself with the last line of the French. In wait as for game, dust-laden figures were lying behind trees and in the open behind little banks of earth which they had spaded. They were firing and the rattle of rifles and the penetrating rat-tat of a French machine-gun from the woods at the other side of the village joined in the refrain. A thousand yards away he saw something as green as the fields, but visible on the grey ribbon of the road, melt into the earth under this burst of bullets. These must be the Germans. Sharp whistles and cracks about his ears—the answer from the rifles of the German skirmish line—made him

leap to the cover of the largest tree-trunk in sight.

"We forced them to deploy!" he heard an officer say.

Then commands were given and the Frenchmen slipped backward on all fours till they were below the skyline, when they became running red legs under humped backs of blue as they hurried away according to plan—and just in time. For now the German guns, which had the signal, loosed their wrath on the village and the neighbouring woodland, where it was thought that the French infantry meant to make a stand in force. Phil stuck to his tree-trunk. But it did not seem of much use when he saw another tree cut in half as by a lumberman's axe with a curling black burst of smoke; and bark and limbs in all directions were being gashed by shell-fragments and shrapnel bullets.

Were the girls in the cellar? He had a sense of deserting his post of duty. He did not care to make the run to the house, but felt that he must; when his honest desire was to drop into the centre of the earth and close an armoured door behind him. So he started, having in mind that he had been second in the hundred-yard dash at college, but might have been first if he had had the incentive of the present moment.

There seemed an end of the outburst—probably an airman had signalled that the French

were out of the woods—when one belated, harrowing scream seemed to have the pit of his stomach as a target just as he saw the white of a woman's gown, the wearer's face hidden by a branch. Then the crash came in front of him. Black smoke and a fountain of earth and shivered tree-roots hid the approaching figure and enveloped it, for it was nearer to the burst than he. Stunned, half thrown off his feet, as he regained them and realised that he was alive it was with the dagger thrust of horrible foreboding.

The thing which he might have prevented must have happened. He rushed into the smoke, stumbled into the shell-crater and clambered wildly out of it, to see Helen rising unhurt and shaking the fresh, moist loam and splinters from her gown. Her hair had been blown almost free of its fastenings by the blast. She threw back her head at sight of him, her startled eyes glowing with the wonder of her escape and the supple figure drawn up as if testing the unscathed existence of muscle and nerve. She might be unnerved at the sight of blood, but she was not afraid of shells.

"Thank heaven!" gasped Phil, and admiringly. "But what are you doing here?" he demanded, in the reaction of anger over her folly.

"You—I came to see what you were doing—yes, what you were doing here!" she said, between deep breaths. "Why not?" She broke

into laughter, that of the challenge across the table at Truckleford, that of even a more reckless humour.

"And your promise to stay in?" he asked.

"I made none!"

"And Henriette?"

"In the cellar."

"Thank heaven! But why are we talking here?" he added.

"Yes, why?" she said, turning to go.

Shells were still screaming far over the tree-tops.

"I think we are safe enough, for the German guns are firing over our heads at the French infantry," he said. "We are between the lines."

Helen said nothing, but walked on rapidly.

"We were very lucky," he continued. "I had a glimpse of you before the burst. It was an awful moment of suspense."

"If we had been a few yards further along or had started a few seconds sooner—how simple!" she added. "I mean, some more people would have been killed in this war—I mean—well, here we are!" and she looked up, smiling.

"None came near the house?" he asked.

"One burst outside the dining-room just as I was leaving," she answered, "but it couldn't have hurt anybody in the cellar. You see the house is quite intact," she added, as they came in sight

of it. "I'm sure that Henriette is safe—and I must add another cartoon to the history of the surviving Sanford, how he dodged the shells!"

She gave him a full look this time which was all mischief. How could any woman be so cool after such a shock? But women can be cool even when their underlips are trembling, as Helen's was. In danger or out of danger, they keep to their parts. Phil could only feel that he had two wonderful cousins and that it was useless to speculate about anybody or anything. Splinters from the branches slashed by shells still clung to Helen's hair; they were a kind of crown of glory for her.

"Now for Henriette!" he said as they entered the house.

A moaning sob from below ceased when he called, and the answer came back, "All right!" an answer that was thick but genuine in its relief. Henriette met him at the foot of the cellar stairs trembling.

"It was awful being here alone!" she said convulsively. "One does like company. Do you think it's all over? And I was worried about Helen when that one burst so close and shook the whole house."

"Helen had a close call, but here she is," said Phil.

Jacqueline was in the dining-room. The wreckage of doors blown from their hinges by

the explosion she had piled against the walls and was now engaged in sweeping up the earth and plaster.

"This is what a woman has to do when men go away to make war instead of staying at home and getting in the harvest!" she grumbled. "Nice mess they have made. So there you are, you foolish girls! I have about lost patience with you both. As I told Mademoiselle Henriette when she was moaning so, she might have been in Paris if she hadn't——"

"I was not moaning!" said Henriette sharply.

"No, *ma chère*, you were not. Thank God, you are alive! Though I don't know but we'd all be better dead than having our homes beaten down about our ears. Look at that!" as the broom disclosed a gash in the oak from a shell-fragment. "This floor I've been polishing for years. And you," she turned on Phil, "I thought that you were going to look after these young ladies and keep them from showing off! But like all men you had to go out and make war and show how brave you were."

"I give my word," said Phil, "that they will not escape again. If necessary I'll arm myself with one of your saucepans."

"The one that the Germans dented, if you wish," she replied. "I can't spare another."

"And the Germans will be here very soon," Phil added, to see what the effect would be.

"It's time. They've sent enough calling cards!" replied Jacqueline. "The dirty, worthless, murderous, savage beasts, eating, swilling, killing other women's boys and destroying other people's property! Now, if you don't bother me it's likely that you will get a better dinner after I've cleaned up."

Advisedly they withdrew into the sitting-room, where Phil became a Roman sentinel on guard. Soon they had glimpses of green figures with cloth-covered helmets working their way through the grounds and along the village streets. But the figures seemed to be too busy to pay any attention to the house. Then shells began to break over the village and grounds again, French shells into the advancing German infantry, which once more sent the cousins to the cellar. When they returned upstairs Jacqueline met them, highly excited.

"I saw it with my own eyes!" she exclaimed. "I couldn't keep indoors when our shells were coming. Yes, I saw one burst right in among the beasts and knock a lot of them over! Three never will get up again and they carried the others away, back to the Kaiser!"

Put a red cap on Jacqueline, and with the flashing of her black eyes she would have needed no further make-up for the storming of the Bastille.

CHAPTER XIX

A CHOICE OF BILLETS

WITH the French guns withdrawn from range, nothing interfered with the remorselessly steady tramp of the column of infantry passing the gate; and out on the main road an unending stream of men, guns, and transport flowed, eyes on the goal of Paris. The chateau and its grounds were an island in the green advancing tide planning to overflow the world.

The three had little appetite for dinner, which Jacqueline prepared earlier than usual. They had finished when one of the green units detached itself from the procession of armed power.

"We billet here to-night," he said in French to Phil, who met him at the door. "How many of you are there? Three? Keep to your bedrooms and leave the rest of the house to us. And you, are you English?"

"No, American."

"And what are you doing here?"

"I am here with my cousins," he answered. "We managed to get their mother away to Paris."

"Keep to your rooms!" was the warning.

A few minutes later a dozen dusty officers with baggage and orderlies arrived. Their guttural voices seemed to fill the rooms. When they wanted to occupy the kitchen Jacqueline was inclined to show fight, but Phil dissuaded her and after her first temperamental outburst she yielded to Cæsar and put her saucepans at the service of Cæsar's minions, who were already rummaging among the preserves and the wines. It was war, a matter of course. Jacqueline being bred of a military race accommodated herself to the fact, with a deadly hate in her heart.

By the wish of the two girls, who plainly preferred not to be alone, they all made Henriette's bedroom a sitting-room. There they sat, listening to the heavy footsteps below, the loud talk with references to Paris, the clinking of glasses and toasts of exultant militarism. Phil's anger was hard to control. He was not of a military race. These men were highwaymen and burglars to him, outraging a home.

A brigadier-general slept in Madame Ribot's room; captains had the sofas and lieutenants the floor. Not until there was silence below did the three separate. Before dawn they were aroused by the harsh gutturals and the noise of packing and hurried breakfasts, before the officers again took their places with their commands and the green river moved on after the few hours' rest

which even German discipline had to concede to the limitations of the human machine. Half-empty preserve jars and wine bottles were on the tables and sausage grease had been ground into the floors. In the littered kitchen industrious Jacqueline had already begun putting things to rights and in due course prepared the morning coffee as usual.

"I feel as if the house had been tainted!" she said.

"They have taken what they wanted," said the curé, who came to tell them that the mayor was made hostage for the good behaviour of the villagers, which meant that all must remain indoors. "I fear, I fear!" he said as he went away. "They are very strong, these barbarians!"

At breakfast the cousins spoke only in monosyllables. A pall was over their thoughts. They could hear the steady tramp of men or the creak of gun-carriages and caissons passing, like a march of fate that would never end. Something was gone from their hearts and minds, from the house, the garden, the air, the world—which was still with them as long as a French soldier stood between them and the enemy. There was nothing to do but stay indoors. The chateau and its grounds became a prison.

Helen took a chair out behind a bush by the gate, where she could look through an opening,

and began sketching. Henriette tried to read a novel. Phil walked in the grounds. What were the old father and mother in Longfield thinking had become of him? How long should he be here? He had turned to go into the house when steps on the walk, with the jingle of spurs, arrested him and he looked around to see a young officer of distinctly Prussian pattern approaching.

Lieutenant von Eichborn, aide to Lieutenant-General von Stein, division commander, was probably four and twenty. From the peak of his helmet to his spurs he thought well of himself and poorly of everybody else in the world who was not Prussian and of his caste. This person in front of him was a civilian. Since August first civilians had been of no account on the continent of Europe. Besides, it was a nuisance to have the owner of a chateau about.

"Do you live here?" he asked.

"Yes, for the present," Phil replied.

"English?" von Eichborn shot at him and in English.

"American!" Phil politely gave monosyllable for monosyllable. He did not like von Eichborn.

"I am going to look over the chateau with a view to making it staff headquarters," said von Eichborn, starting toward the door past Phil.

"Evidently," said Phil.

Von Eichborn wheeled on him.

"Take care!" he said. "I am an officer."

"I judged that you were," Phil replied, with studied politeness.

Von Eichborn stared, frowned. Phil neither stared nor frowned; he smiled.

"What else am I to say?" he added. "I am not used to military customs."

Von Eichborn strolled on into the hall.

"Pleasant place. I think it will do—the best in this neighbourhood, anyway. But I'll go through it."

Henriette rose from her chair as he entered the sitting-room and the aide of General von Stein who thought so well of himself, startled, put up his eye-glass, dropped it, and made a low bow.

"The chateau belongs to Mademoiselle Ribot's mother," Phil explained.

"Most charming place, most charming!" said von Eichborn, speaking French now, while he was looking into Henriette's eyes and smiling.

"We think so," Henriette replied, and she smiled, partly in response to his admiration, perhaps, as well as for policy's sake.

"Madame, your mother is not here?"

"No. She succeeded in getting away on the last train to Paris."

"Perhaps I shall see her there," von Eichborn remarked.

"You are quite sure?" Henriette flashed.

Her spirit seemed to please him: at least, he

smiled again. A straight, fine figure of militarism he made, his head inclined toward her; but the thickish lips, the rather outstanding ears with heavy lobes, and the straight line from neck to crown marked him as a brute.

"Then you are quite alone here?" he continued.

"My sister and Cousin Phil are here."

"Oh!" He glanced back at Phil casually.

"I hope that we may be disturbed as little as possible," she ventured.

"We are not such barbarians as you think," he said, with a laugh. "As a matter of fact, I do not see why you should be disturbed at all. There is another chateau on the list which belongs to the Count de la Grange, and as I have the say for my uncle, the General, I do not see why that will not serve as well."

"Yes, the Count is away!" put in Henriette quickly. "Thank you very much!" This with a gracious smile as a livelier expression of her acknowledgment of his courtesy.

"Done!" he answered promptly, smiling back at her. "I shall see that you are quite undisturbed, I promise you, unless some one has to billet here. We may be crowded and may be here some time if your scepticism about our taking of Paris is well-grounded." He made the bow of a Berlin salon, his heels clicking together, as he withdrew.

Phil went into the grounds with him.

"It's very good of you," he managed to say.

"Don't mention it!" replied von Eichborn.

"A very charming cousin. She speaks French like a Frenchwoman and looks like one. And you are an American?"

"A distant cousin;" and Phil tried to explain a situation whose awkwardness von Eichborn only emphasised the more by one or two subtle remarks. Phil bit his lip and reminded himself that he was in the presence of Prussian force.

"A peculiar position for an American," von Eichborn observed. "I hope your papers are all right."

"Quite!"

"That is fortunate. You may be interrogated. The secret service is very watchful, you know. Good-morning!"

Phil watched the ramrod form to the tune of the jingling spurs disappear past the gate-post. He was disgusted and thoughtful.

"I am very glad that you are here with us," said Henriette soberly, when he returned to the house. She, too, had been thinking.

CHAPTER XX

UNDER ARREST

AN hour later a Prussian sergeant and two privates marched into the grounds. The sergeant mounted the steps and having rung the bell proceeded to hammer on the door. Phil answered the call, and was not long in realising that he was under arrest. The sergeant could not say why, such details not being in his orbit of duty. His orders were to bring one young man from the chateau to headquarters. The only thing for Phil was to take the situation philosophically.

"I never did like melodrama," he said, as he stood by the steps under the guard of the two privates, while the sergeant was searching his room for incriminating evidence.

"Don't!" pleaded the girls together. "Don't joke about it!"

"And answer all their questions politely," added Helen. "If we don't hear anything by to-night we'll come to headquarters or get the curé to go there."

"I'll be as polite as pie," said Phil. "And don't you be too serious about it," he added warn-

ingly, in turn. "When I show my papers to some one in authority I'll be all right."

"It was I who got you into this!" Helen exclaimed, beset by a new thought. "If I hadn't stayed——"

Perhaps a better "if" would have referred to Henriette's beauty.

"Nonsense! It's all a mistake!" said Phil.

"Plot complete!" he added, as the sergeant appeared with the letters and papers that he had found in Phil's room carefully tied up and announced, with barrack-room gruffness that it was time to march.

Phil could only smile over his shoulder as he was faced about under the escort of the two privates. From Helen he had an encouraging smile in response; from Henriette a look of fright and appeal. Inwardly he was boiling. It was the first time that he or any Sanford for many generations had known the loss of liberty for five minutes. This callous old sergeant, these two men with fixed bayonets walking on either side of Phil, had no business in France. They were invaders.

On through the village street beside the gorge of transport he was conducted, then down the long avenue of trees to Count de la Grange's chateau. There he was halted and every scrap of paper in his pockets removed. He stood for a time, while officers and messengers passed

up and down the steps, before he was taken indoors.

At the end of the long hall, its ceiling cracked and yellow from the neglect of impoverished nobility, its walls hung with family portraits, sat General Rousseau under guard, his aquiline nose and finely-moulded chin in bold relief. As Phil was directed along the hall, the sound of his steps on the marble flooring drew the General's attention. The glances of the two met. Phil was about to speak, when his impulse was stayed by the fact that he was looking at a profile which seemed oblivious of his presence.

"He is in trouble and does not want to recognise me lest he get me in trouble," Phil thought, "or I might get him into deeper trouble."

The General sat stiffly erect, a space between his coat back and the chair back, something distinguished and calm in his manner, with a smiling turn to his lips which completed an air of quiet triumph unaffected by his surroundings. Directly an officer came out from one of the rooms and motioned to the General to enter the open door in front of him. Phil was then moved up to the seat thus vacated, whence he could look into the salon, with its long French windows open on the garden. Before a table sat a German general of fifty-five or so, his bullet head close-cropped and his profile as set as if it were carved out of stone. On the wall at his back was a large map

with blue pencil markings. In front of him stood old Rousseau, head up, his lips still having the turn of a faint smile.

Division Commander von Stein was reading from a paper, which stated that the General had given information to the enemy by means of carrier pigeons.

"What have you to say?" demanded von Stein.

"That I am not a lawyer; but, speaking as a soldier," replied General Rousseau in an even voice, "I am happy to say that my last pigeon went before you could intercept it."

"As a soldier you knew what to report," said von Stein rather affably. "It was clever of you and you must have sent some valuable information."

If he could learn the nature of the information it might enable him to counteract some of its results; but General Rousseau's smile broadened a little at this obvious bait of flattery.

"I'm even a good enough soldier not to tell you that," he replied. "Perhaps your soldiers are learning this moment," he added proudly.

"As you have confessed——" von Stein rapped out in irritation.

"Yes," replied the General calmly, almost sweetly.

"You know the penalty?"

"Yes. I expected it. I found a way to serve France and I am ready."

Without waiting on further instructions, closing the interview himself with a certain disdainful impatience, he saluted and turned toward his guard. The full light through the large windows limned his fine, aristocratic profile and his gaunt, tall form. He was victorious in that moment and a gentleman; and the man in the chair, conscious of some quality in the Frenchman lacking in himself but admiring as soldier to soldier, exclaimed "It is war!" and rose to his feet, saluting the man whom he had condemned, in turn.

Phil had the call to disregard his own position and rush to General Rousseau's side in his tribute of admiration. It seemed horrible at first thought to see that gallant veteran go to his death without a friendly word. But two girls were waiting at the chateau for Phil's return. He imagined that the General preferred to be alone. Nothing could equal the knowledge of his deed for France in comforting him. Still disdainful of the Prussian, lips still turned in a smile, he was marched out into the grounds—which is the full explanation of why Madame Ribot had only the Count for an escort to Paris.

Since an old man had been caught releasing pigeons which carried information to the French as to the location of three divisions of German troops and might cost the Germans five thousand

men, von Stein was taking a hand in the espionage problem himself. Phil was summoned and, standing on the same spot where General Rousseau had stood, he saw all his letters and his diary lying on the Commander's table. Two officers were standing on either side of him. One of them went out after the Commander had signed some papers, and through the open door Phil had a glimpse through other open doors of rooms with walls hung with maps and of telegraph instruments and officers writing and conferring. Here was the inner circle of a division command directing all the action of guns and men which he had seen from the terrace at Mervaux, with office routine in a secluded chateau; while von Stein, the man with the responsibility of decisions, sat aloof in the salon.

The remaining officer, a major, evidently had something to do with Phil's case. Phil recalled Helen's advice: Answer all their questions politely. This he would do; and, with the example of General Rousseau as an inspiration, he waited for the first move. Von Stein looked up slowly, raising his bushy eyebrows to see what sort of dirt this was in front of him, and then regarded Phil with a sweeping glance of ferocity. It was the very thing to give Phil smiling confidence.

"Old Frightfulness is going to try to scare me!" he thought.

Having been both in Germany and in the Southwest, he recognised that the tactics of a master hand in the world's greatest military machine might be humanly the same as those of a bandit leader across the Rio Grande.

"So you are the spy!" von Stein growled.

"Not at all, sir!" Phil replied.

"Be careful! You are on oath."

"So I understand."

"Are you English?" demanded von Stein, with an access of roaring emphasis.

From the frequency of this question and its venom Phil gathered that the English could not be popular in German military circles.

"No, American."

"Prove it!"

"As you have all my papers there, may I suggest that you have the proof?"

Von Stein mumbled an ejaculation through his moustache, while the corrugations between the bushy brows and the grey line of closely-clipped hair twitched.

"What are you in Europe for?"

"To see Europe—and I'm seeing more of it than I bargained for," answered Phil.

"Do not joke! War is war! What do you mean, you a foreigner, an American, you say, by being here when our army came?"

"Your army came so fast that I could not get

away from it," said Phil drily, as he might on a hot day in cactus land.

"Hur-r-r!" or something like it, escaped through von Stein's moustache and he wiggled his lips in a way that might have meant an effort to control a grin. "Why are you in that chateau?"

Phil explained quite clearly, even telling how Helen had remained behind and he had returned to look after her and to find that it was impossible to get away before the army came.

"What is your business in America?"

Phil told this, too.

"As you say; but how can we tell that what you say is true?"

"As obviously neither my own statement nor appearance counts, by investigation of my references at home through my government, if my papers and letters are not sufficient."

"Hur-r-r!" again mumbled von Stein. Then he broke out with fearful frightfulness: "Don't you know that we can have you shot as a spy?" he thundered.

As Phil had previously remarked, he had never liked melodrama. It had quite gone out of fashion at home, except in motion pictures of the Southwest as shown in New York and of New York as shown in the Southwest.

"Considering the number of your soldiers, not to mention the number of your guns and that I

am unarmed, I should venture, with all respect, to say that that is a safe statement," said Phil, and he was smiling pleasantly.

"Hur-r-r!" again through the moustache; but in von Stein's grey eyes appeared an irresistible twinkle and this time he actually grinned. He was not without a sense of humour. He read the *Fliegende Blätter* every week.

"It agrees with my examination of his papers," put in the Major, indicating the exhibit on the table. "One of these letters is from his employer, a big man on the other side," he added; and Phil, who knew German better than French, understood the remark.

The General took three or four minutes to run his eye over the letters and the diary, grumbling the while, and finally snorting with disgust as he picked them up and handed them to Phil.

"Who brought these charges?" he demanded of the Major. Up to that time he had read only the presentment of the case and the object of his questions had been to trip the accused.

"Lieutenant von Eichborn, sir."

Now Phil saw what Prussian rage was like; the rage against inefficiency, against disobedience and waste of time.

"Fool! Puppy dog! Pampered jackanapes!" he roared. "Tell that worthless nephew of mine to come here! I'll deal with him for the last time!"

"He is out, sir. He went to see about a billet for himself," said the Major dryly officially, but in his eyes was a satisfied gleam as the General literally choked with rage against not only all the un-Prussian crimes already mentioned, but worse.

"Out! A personal aide out without my permission in time of war! Billeting away from this chateau! If there are no beds, let him sleep on the floor at my door ready for my call! Out—when we are fighting a battle!"

"Possibly you will find him at Mervaux," Phil could not help saying, "engaged in persecuting my cousin—which accounts for my impatience at being here under false charges."

"Take care, sir!" said von Stein, turning his ferocity on Phil. "You are a civilian making accusations against a Prussian officer and gentleman!"

"A suggestion only. Am I acquitted? I am in haste to return."

Von Stein lowered his brows, with a searching look at Phil.

"Of course you think we are Huns," he said. "The English have told you so. Huns!" The very word irritated him, yet he seemed to like to repeat it. "Huns! We bring order wherever we go. We are fighting in our defence in a war that was forced upon us!"

There, Phil let his Southwestern sense of humour eclipse discretion.

"Yes, the English and the French secretly prepared against you! They made thousands of new guns and marched into Belgium and invaded Germany!" he said.

The Commander's eyes blazed. He stammered. Phil thought that he had done for himself; and then that old professional soldier grinned.

"Huns, are we? You go back to your chateau and stay there. Not a thing on the premises will be harmed. You will be as safe as you are at home. Everybody is. If you are not, let me know. And tell your friends in America that we are not Huns."

For after the orgy of Belgium orders had come from the Most High which had America in mind. Even the Most High realised the moral force of the hundred million people across the water. Even the Most High had found that there was a thing called world public opinion.

"Stood up to it, that young man!" muttered von Stein after Phil had gone. Having been used to ordering inferiors about all his life, he had had a diversion. "Now!" as another officer came into the room with a report.

He was the cool man of judgment and precision as he went to the map, drew some lines with his pencil, and gave some orders. After this officer had departed he was alone in the big room. Leaders out on the battle line had been told what

to do and they must do it on his responsibility. He could give no further orders till he knew the result. Opening the door to the adjoining room he asked:

"How long will it take to run to the chateau of Mervaux?"

"Five minutes, sir!"

"Good! I'll be back in a quarter of an hour and I am to be found there or on the road."

He strode out to the powerful motor-car that was always in waiting for him.

CHAPTER XXI

A BIT FROM THE MOVIES

WITHOUT any regard to melodrama, when Henriette looked out of the window after von Eichborn had rung the bell and saw him on the steps she was frightened. The look in his eyes as he left her had been burning in her recollection—the kind of look a woman never forgets. His smile as he bowed to her now was characteristic of his good opinion of himself.

“Having an idle moment I came to call,” he said.

“Oh, thank you!” she answered wildly.

He waited for her to come to the door, but she stood still, pressing her fingers to her temples in blank quandary. Possibly a sense of self-accusation heightened her distraction. She had been polite to him; she had rather opened the way to this visit. How was she to escape? She looked around at her wits' end and saw that Helen was in the room.

“I can't see him, I can't!” she exclaimed. “You must get me out of it! I never want to speak to him again!”

She turned to the door opening onto the stairway and ran through it, leaving Helen looking after her in doubt as to what it all meant.

Von Eichborn, having formed the habit in a month of war of walking into chateaux without formality, waiting no longer for Henriette to come into the hall, entered the sitting-room. Helen's back was turned to him and he easily mistook her figure for Henriette's.

"I accepted the invitation from the window, which I found very charming," he said, "though from your present attitude I might be led to think that I am not welcome."

Rather slowly Helen turned, possibly in a certain cynical anticipation of his visible surprise when he saw her face instead of the one which had led him, an aide, to absent himself from the General's side. Even that martial self-possession of a darling of Berlin drawing-rooms was temporarily thrown off its balance.

"Oh!" gasped von Eichborn.

"Yes," said Helen, thoughtfully looking him over with a lift of her chin, "I'm Henriette's sister." Inwardly she was "fighting mad," but her eyes were coldly staring.

"Your voices are alike, but you do not look alike," von Eichborn managed to say. He screwed his eyeglass into his eye.

"Really! You have quick perceptions!" she remarked.

Von Eichborn dropped his eyeglass and flicked his gloves, which he was carrying in his hand, against the table.

"And the sister? I came to see her."

"She does not want to see you, and I'm sure I don't. You would be a dreadful bore." All quite judiciously as she looked him over; the Helen of impulses, when she ought to have been diplomatic for Phil's sake, according to melodramatic ethics.

"Bore!" That darling of Berlin salons a bore! "Look here, you shrewish, homely little brute, I've nothing to do with you!" he blurted. "Tell your sister I'm here—if she is your sister. I think you're only a servant."

Still Helen was looking him over with cool, superior eyes.

"Very bad-mannered, too!" she remarked.

"But perceptions correct. Shrewish and homely, yes!"

Nobody on earth had ever spoken to him in this fashion before. He did not think such disrespect was possible. He was red-faced and stuttering as he took a step toward her, raising his gloves as if he would strike her as he often had struck his soldier servant; but his hand dropped in face of her unflinching stare.

"Look here! Do you know that I am an officer on the staff of the army in possession of this

village? I'm going to be billeted here and I propose to choose my room."

He moved toward the door that led to the stairs.

"Certainly!" she answered, passing through it ahead of him. He was dumbfounded at her compliance and suspicious of its promptness. "Henriette, the beast is going to billet himself here!" she shouted up the stairs. "You pass through the other way and I will meet you outside and we'll go to the curé, who will speak to the General in command about it. The General may be a decent, respectable man."

Von Eichborn drew back from the doorway. Again he tried to fasten his eyeglass in his eye; again it would not stick. As Helen looked around at him after her call to her sister, with that in her stare which made him appear the most ridiculous little puppy that ever left a kennel, he mumbled:

"Unnecessary!"

Then she saw Phil hurrying across the grounds. She only knew how glad she was to see him and that she felt limp in her relief as he appeared in the room, looking so strong and ready for any eventuality. It was another picture of him that she would never forget.

Von Eichborn, as he turned in surprise and stood there between the two, was sheepish and confused as a human being, before his sense of

authority and position vented its truculence with a snarling irony of inference.

"You seem not to have been looking after your cousins," he said. "I judge that the prettier one is quite devoted to you and the shrew here keeps guard in your absence."

Something carried Phil a step nearer to von Eichborn involuntarily; and what came into his eyes was distilled of that old blood and tempered by three years in the Southwest.

"And you, I judge," he replied, "are a cowardly beast, going about sneaking into homes when no men are present and others in your uniform are under fire!"

Cowardly was the word that sent von Eichborn out of his head with anger. He struck at Phil's face with his gloves, but missed. The rest was very simple. Von Eichborn went sprawling. His descent was rapid and unexpected and the stunning effect of the impact was accentuated by the way his head hit the floor.

"Good! good!" Helen cried, clapping her hands. "It was never done better in the movies! Good! goo——" The word was unfinished, her jaw dropping aghast with the seriousness of the situation.

When von Eichborn came to and realised what had happened, that he had been brutally knocked down by a civilian, he reached for his revolver.

There was murder in his little eyes. But Phil had already taken the revolver out of its holster.

"You have struck a Prussian officer on duty!" he stammered as he got to his feet. "That is death, as you will find out as soon as I can bring some men."

He was going past Phil out of the door; but Phil barred the way.

"Wait!"

And von Eichborn had to wait. The position was strange. Here was the darling of Berlin salons and the aide of the General who commanded a division of troops which possessed the land balked by a mere civilian, a mere tourist; neither being armed. It was humiliating, disgusting, shameful. Von Eichborn could not try to force his way to the door for fear that he might be knocked down again.

"Yes, wait and consider," Phil added. "Let's not do anything rash, but think it over. Now——"

"Phil, don't!" Helen broke in wildly. "You, an American, don't realise. He can have you shot for striking him."

"After he struck me?"

"That has nothing to do with it!" put in von Eichborn hoarsely. "I'm an officer!"

"It's all true what he says!" said Helen. There was no banter of melodrama about her

now. The scene had become tensely real and horrible.

"But it does not stand to reason! It's——"

"Don't smile in that way!" she pleaded. "We'll lock him in a closet and I'll stand guard. That will give you time to run for it—or some other plan—anything so they will not get you—please, please!"

"Very moving picture-ish that, Helen," he said. "No. I'll go with von Eichborn to see his General and explain that an officer invading a private house struck me and I struck him back, that being a custom of my country and I being ignorant of the customs of foreign countries. Come!" As he led the way out of doors he added to von Eichborn: "Some men in your position might want to forget the whole experience."

"Not that you struck me when in uniform! Never!" von Eichborn said. "My uncle will punish that. You will be shot, as Belgians were for the same offence."

Helen followed them. Henriette was already in the grounds, having come down from her room by the other stairway. Thus von Stein, alighting from his car, had the whole group before him as he approached. At sight of him, von Eichborn murmured something under his breath and clicked his heels together as he saluted.

"So there you are, you scoundrel!" called out the General.

Von Eichborn knew how to deal with the rage of an uncle who had no son of his own.

"Yes, sir," he said humbly. "I came to interrogate these two young women about this man's case."

"Without leave!" put in von Stein sternly.

"Time was important. The Major said you would not need me. You were busy."

"No excuse!" blurted von Stein.

"Sorry, sir!" replied von Eichborn. "Then this man returned to the house and struck me with his fist!"

"You struck an officer!" Von Stein turned on Phil, Prussian indignation overwhelming every other idea. "Why didn't you shoot him?" he demanded of von Eichborn.

"He took away my revolver when I was down and stunned," explained von Eichborn.

"Baby!" roared von Stein. "And you—" to Phil, "you struck an officer! That is settled!"

"After he had struck at me!" replied Phil steadily.

"Yes, at his face with his gloves!" put in Helen, stepping forward and looking squarely at the General. "I saw it. And he was not here to interrogate us. He wanted to go upstairs where my sister was. Then our cousin came."

Von Stein gave the two girls a scrutinising look. There was truth in Helen's eyes as surely as Henriette was beautiful. He liked Helen, not

having much use for beautiful women, being unhappily married to one. But aside from her evidence he knew that his nephew was lying, as he had before to get himself out of a scrape.

"Did you try to go upstairs? Answer!" he said to von Eichborn, who understood from experience that confession was best when his uncle spoke in that fashion.

"Yes, sir!"

"And you struck at him?"

"Yes, he insulted me."

"After his insult!" interrupted Phil.
"I——"

"Silence!" von Stein roared to Phil. "I'll attend to your case later. Now, as for you," to von Eichborn, "first, aide of a division general absent without leave in time of action; second, billeting himself without consent of his superior; third, wasting his superior's time with a set of foolish charges against a civilian for a mean personal motive; fourth, an offence to two young women alone in a house. All entirely in keeping with previous reprehensible conduct, without the excuse of drunkenness this time."

Thus Prussian system established the case, while von Eichborn stood stock-still, heels together, and trembling.

"You have played on my sensibilities for the last time," continued von Stein. "No matter how your mother pleads, you go back to your regiment,

where you will have the chance to die like a soldier if there's any good in you. Go to the car!"

Von Eichborn saluted and obeyed.

"You have seen Prussian justice done," von Stein said, turning to Phil. "But you—you struck a Prussian officer with your fist!" His anger grew as he thought of the offence against the military caste. "You—you go to the car, too!"

"The custom of my country!" said Phil, without moving. "We have our code of personal honour as well as you. I could not have done otherwise and ever looked my friends in the face. When they hear the story and your view, sir, well——"

"The barbarians will call us Huns!" von Stein interrupted savagely.

"Yes, I should think so!"

It seemed unreal, this situation. But there was the Foreign Office in Berlin and the instructions from the Most High since the whirlwind of American indignation about Belgium. And this young man acted as if he were somebody of importance.

"I'll show you what Prussian clemency is," said von Stein. "Because you are a foreigner and ignorant, I will overlook the offence. Keep to the grounds, as I told you, and nobody will interfere with you!"

After he had gone, sitting on the back seat

of the car with the expression of one who was conscious of an act of noble toleration, with von Eichborn on the front seat beside the chauffeur, the three cousins stared at one another wonderingly, Henriette's eyes radiant of her appreciation.

"You saved my life, first, and this time——" She did not need to finish the phrase except with her eyes.

Helen, whose relief had been so personal, rallied herself a little nervously with a return to banter.

"That was surely a bit from the movies, serio-comic!" she said. "Still another cartoon of our hero's progress in Europe! We'll call it, 'And he shot his strong right arm out and the villain bit the dust.'"

"Helen, one of these days I'll——" Phil fumbled for words in his embarrassment.

"Do something else grand and I'll make a cartoon of that, too!" she said as she went into the house. When she looked into the mirror again it was with smiling self-congratulation. "Plain face, you were of some use once, anyway!" she said.

CHAPTER XXII

VICTORY!

A PRUSSIAN command had been given. The three would be undisturbed in their retreat as long as they remained within the grounds of the chateau. Of itself this was no great hardship; its irritation deep from the fact that it was by Prussian command.

Any sense of awkwardness in their personal situation had passed. It seemed quite natural that they should be there together with Jacqueline and her saucepans. Their story as a story halted, even as the heartbeats of mankind halted, while it waited for the result of the Marne.

How quiet the house! How quiet the shaded paths! The roads were empty now of all save transport feeding man and gun and of ambulances returning with German wounded. Quiet here and hell far away over the hills, where the destiny of France and the world was being settled in the toss with death. Be it the three, or the children and the women and the old men in the village, the personal thought had been submerged in straining inquiry of how the battle was going.

Sound was its barometer. Farther and farther the voice of the guns had travelled, but never out of hearing. It hovered at one point as the titanic struggle came to a decision. The three talked little; consciously or unconsciously, they were always listening for something from the distance. No newspapers; no letters; no telegrams! Only flagellating wonder and suspense! All the world behind dense curtains of secrecy, not knowing whether, when they were drawn, there would be sunlight or black night outside.

Helen went on with her sketching or pretended to, but found herself staring at the paper and listening and praying for France. Twice Henriette attempted to continue with the portrait, but she made no progress. All three read a good deal, Helen by herself, slipping away from the other two when they were together. They awakened and they went to sleep to the echo of low thunder, thunder marching in a treadmill. Then there were lapses when the guns were not heard, and something seemed to catch in their throats. Had the Germans won? When the wind changed and the rumble became distinct again, what relief!

Their steps seemed always to lead to the terrace, for there they could hear more plainly; and there they would walk up and down after dinner, the dew-moist air soft against their faces, Phil in the middle, with the voices of the two girls so

alike that they seemed to express a delightful cousinship in one personality. He had ceased to think of the future. Everything waited on the result of the battle. At times he wished for action; that he, too, might be striking some kind of a blow.

Those strolls in the darkness and the voice in his ears, now Helen's, now Henriette's, seemed to have become a part of his life; something from which he would never be disassociated. It was the symbol for Henriette, frightened and helpless, as he carried her to the gully and for Helen emerging, with triumph shining in her eyes, from the dust and smoke of the shell that had exploded between them. Helen had a little prayer for France which she used to repeat, sometimes softly, again belligerently with hands clenched.

"As if prayers did any good!" she said. "Only killing counts! A butcher boy from Berlin could fire a shell that would destroy the Venus di Milo."

"France will win because there is still a God in heaven!" was the rallying judgment of Jacqueline, when everybody was blue.

Up at dawn, sweeping, dusting, and scouring, it was she who brought the first glorious word. She burst into Helen's room, awakening her with a cry of:

"It's nearer—nearer! Listen!"

Helen ran to Henriette's room and then she

pounded on Phil's door. Could imagination be deceiving them again? Phil slipped into his clothes and hurried out to the terrace. He could see the burst of light smoke once more against the green of the hills which had hidden the battle, and transport going to the rear along the road was more numerous. Only ammunition trucks and ambulances were moving forward. He ran back to the house in schoolboy delight, shouting the news.

"They will dent my saucepans, will they," said Jacqueline, "and rub sausage grease into my floors!"

She, too, went to the terrace to watch that unfolding panorama of German retreat; of cavalry which was covering it caught in the hot breath of the *soixante-quinze*; of guns which were covering it forced back from position to position.

Staggering through the village street came the conquerors of yesterday, their glazed eyes under heavy lids, keeping dogged step from force of long discipline—they who were not to see Paris! French shell-fire kept approaching till shrapnel began to break over the village. Again the three had to take to the cellar, where for a while they heard the rattle of rifle and machine-gun fire and an occasional cheer—a kind of cheer that sounded strangely familiar to Phil. When they came upstairs the figures passing in the village street were no longer in green, but in khaki. The remnants

of the little British army which had retreated from Mons was tasting the joy of pursuit.

Everybody in the village was out, lining the road; everybody, from Mère Perigord to infants in arms, displaying the smiles they had been conserving while they had been glaring at the Germans. The children gathered flowers and tossed them to *les Anglais* before their eyes in the life, looking just as they had looked in the picture papers.

"How do you like being a conquering hero, Bill?" one *Anglais* called to another, as he stuck a rose in his cap and relit the "fag" cigarette stump which he had been saving behind his ear in the midst of charges and shell-fire. Plodding stoically on, these regulars, taking the day's work as it came, and this was a day's work to their liking. "Are we down-hearted? No!" Every one of them looked at Phil. There was no mistaking him; he must speak English. The lean, tired officers waved their hands in greeting to the young man and two girls who were beaming the welcome of their hearts.

"Sorry we can't stay to tea!" one called merrily.

It was a suggestion. Afternoon tea for the English! An opportunity for the chateau to furnish an important British munition of war, as the battalion halted waiting orders from somebody up ahead! Jacqueline made a pail of tea,

which the three passed out, along with slices of bread spread with jam as long as there was any left.

"Jolly good of you!" said the officers. "Such good tea, too—and jam! This takes a bit of beating. Thanks awfully!"

The battalion passed on with the tide of battle.

"This is the only time that I have not felt perfectly helpless," said Helen. "There is so little a woman can do when fighting is all that counts."

"I was thinking of that myself," said Phil. "How helpless I am, though an able-bodied man!"

"But you did knock a German down!" said Helen, with one of her mischievous glances.

From the terrace they could now see the French everywhere, in the ravines and on the roads, sweeping across the fields in the wonderfully ordered system of a great army which had had generations of training.

"It is good—good—good!" said Helen.

They had recovered something which they had lost: the sense of freedom. The chateau and the grounds were once more their own; their minds and their souls were their own. Jacqueline's exaltation expressed itself in an amazingly good dinner; Helen's in a series of fresh cartoons over their coffee, which included "our hero" from the Southwest knocking down the German.

A call from the curé brought word that trains would begin running to Paris on the morrow, which was a reminder to all that their period of isolation was over; and for Phil a strange and memorable holiday would be at an end. Helen went out with the curé and Phil and Henriette turned up the path. After they had watched the flashes of the guns in the distance for a while, they started walking slowly back and forth.

"I don't know what we should have done if you had not been here," she said.

"At least, I kept you in the cellar! Are you glad that you came?" he asked.

"I would not have missed it for worlds!" answered Henriette. "And I owe it to you."

"No, to Helen. But for her we should have been in Paris."

"Yes, that's true," she replied thoughtfully. "And what would have become of her if we had not come?"

"Gone on sketching until a shell hit her, I should say."

"Or until she saw a wounded man and fainted! But there is something that I do owe to you and to you alone," Henriette went on softly. "I am appalled when I think of it—of the obligation. I—well——" now one of her trickling, enchanting laughs. "There's the portrait to repay you! I think that we might have a sitting in the morning."

Here a white figure appeared around the corner of the path, and they were face to face with Helen. She drew back in the embarrassment of one conscious of more than a mere inadvertent intrusion.

"I was going to look at the gun-fire for a minute," she said. It might have been Henriette's voice suddenly changing the subject. She had on the simple gown whose cut was the same as Henriette's, who had dressed for dinner that evening with her usual care. Something in Helen's distraitness, a sense of her loneliness, aroused an impulse in Phil.

"Make it three!" said he. He went to her, took her hand and drew her arm into his. She seemed to resist slightly and then to yield almost tremblingly. Henriette also slipped her arm into his.

"Cousins!" she exclaimed, a happy thought in view of the situation in more ways than one.

They paced on together, two white slippers moving from under white skirts against the dark earth in unison with his own steps. Cousins! But any reason for his remaining at Mervaux was past.

"Now I shall go to Paris to-morrow," said Phil, "and inform your mother, wherever she is, that you are all right, and get off a cable to an old couple in Longfield which will stop their worrying."

"I think that we had better go with you," said Henriette. "Don't you, Helen?"

"Yes, to Paris!" said Helen, with such definiteness that it surprised her sister. Her mind was no less fixed than when she had decided to remain alone at Mervaux. She and her thousand francs and her sketches were going to America in the hazard of new fortunes. "I only ran up to see the gun-fire and I think I'll look in on Mère Perigord and get her views on the state of affairs in France," she added, starting to withdraw her hand: but Phil held it fast.

"Our last night together at Mervaux," he said. "Let Mère Perigord wait."

Something strong and irresistible in his grip made her yield; but he could not see the twinge in her features hidden by the darkness. It was torture for her, this promenade with the man to whom she had said "Yes." The desire for flight had never been so strong; flight from Mervaux and all old associations to new worlds.

They had ceased to talk as they kept on rhythmically pacing in the dark, each with his own thoughts. Phil, looking backward now when the strain had passed, saw the whole experience at Mervaux with a sense of personal incompetency; as a helpless spectator of action.

"I'm getting sleepy!" Helen pleaded at last.

"So am I," Phil replied. "Four more turns!" He did not like to part with their companionship

in the faint starlight this last evening at Mervaux.

"You will go straight to America?" Henriette asked, as they started toward the house.

"I think so, if I can catch a steamer. I imagine that not one-tenth of the homeward rush has been accommodated yet."

Not until they reached the door did the three unlink arms. Helen, blinking into the lamplight of the hall, bent her head. She was swallowing as if she would try her voice before she said "Good-night!" with the faintest smile, as for an instant her eyes looked into his and he saw something that reminded him of the brilliancy and fearlessness that had shone when she rose from the ground after the shell-burst, but now veiled.

Henriette paused and, as the door closed behind Helen, held out her hand to say her own good-night. After looking into Helen's eyes he was looking into Henriette's, which had the wondering gratitude of the moment when he had laid her on the turf in the gully, and her smile, as her eyelashes flickered, added the touch of exquisite charm to her appealing beauty. Involuntarily in answer to it he drew her hand toward him.

"Henriette!"

She turned her head, her profile with parted lips toward him, and her cheek so near that impulse pressed his lips to it. At this she drew away,

not quickly but steadily, looking back into his eyes, and after a tightening of her fingers drew them free. Then in a flutter, her own eyes luminous with surprise, she precipitately turned toward the door. In her room, smiling into her mirror which smiled back, she was pleased with the way the thing had been done; but to Phil her figure, as it passed through the doorway, became unaccountably the figure of Helen.

CHAPTER XXIII

LONGFIELD DECIDES

HOW Madame Ribot travelled third-class all night to Boulogne, where she was crowded on board a steamer with Belgian refugees and American tourists, whom she found equally objectionable in interfering with her comfort, and then finally to London and Truckleford, was a narrative which excited such sympathy in the simple vicarage that life there was soon adapted entirely to her habits. News that her daughters were safe was a relief to her: but the announcement that they were on their way to join her brought a premonition of overcrowding.

The same kind of journey that she had made the three cousins made. From London Henriette went on to Truckleford, but Helen astounded her sister by remaining in town, giving as her reason that she wanted to see if she could not sell some of her sketches. She said nothing of her trip to America, which she realised once she saw the crowds of stranded Americans must be given up for the present for want of steamer accommodation. Her *au revoir* to Phil had been

spoken at the Victoria Station; a handshake, with the understanding that they would meet at Truckleford. Thus they parted without his knowing her hotel. A few hours later she was sitting beside the desk of an agent while he looked over her few finished sketches. As businesslike as M. Vaillant, he told her to go home and do more, and he would try to dispose of those that were completed.

Something which had been working in Phil's secret brain had come to a head. The recollection of having been marched up a village street between two Prussian bayonets did not sit easily in the blood of his inheritance of freedom. The French were fighting against that kind of tyranny; those poor Belgian women and children on the steamer were the victims of it. When he stepped ashore at Folkestone it was with the thrill of relief of one who has come to the home of another kind of principle, which was that of his inheritance. Here they were speaking his own tongue; here the system was individualism. The green pastures and hedges had an appeal which they lacked before he crossed the Channel. On the train an *attaché* of the Paris Embassy whom he knew had introduced him to a general, who had asked Phil to look in at the War Office. In London the press and the hoardings called to arms. War was in the air; and he was young. Instead of trying to push his way through the crowd in front

of the steamship offices, he went to a cable office and sent a despatch to Longfield:

"With your permission I am going to fight. Answer."

Dr. Sanford received this message only twenty-four hours later than one from Paris announcing that Phil was on his way to London. The girl in the telegraph office saw the Doctor passing along the street on his afternoon constitutional just after the despatch had been clicked in from New York. It was not her business to know what was in telegrams once she had transcribed them; but this one was like a hot breath from the cataclysm shot across the Atlantic into a quiet New England village. She pretended to be busy as she watched the Doctor. On this occasion his spectacles happened to be in the right-hand trousers' pocket, which was the last one that he investigated. Ever since he had had to wear spectacles he had tried in vain to establish a system of carrying them in the same pocket; but in order to have it work he must think which was the right pocket when he put them in, rather than when he came to look for them.

The girl was amazed when he gave no indication of excitement after the reading, let alone a start of surprise, which "certainly beat me," to put it in her own language, "considering how he worshipped Phil and Phil was asking permission to be killed in Europe like he was asking permis-

sion to go fishing. People are queer, and never so queer as when they get notice of sudden death or an elopement!"

When she asked, belying her gasping curiosity, if there was any answer, the Doctor said "None!" in his quiet, absent-minded way, as he folded the telegram and this time put the spectacles in his inside coat pocket.

"I must think this over a little before I speak to mother about it," he thought, after he had turned into the street and as soon as he was capable of thinking—such had been the blow of the message. The shadow of the statue lay across his path at the time. He looked up at the ancestor questioningly. The ancestor kept on charging British redcoats.

Dr. Sanford took a long way around back to the house. Every familiar landmark seemed to recall some boyhood anecdote of Phil. If only there had been two boys or a girl! With all of his thinking he was blank-minded when he sat down in his favourite chair on the porch.

"What's happened, dear?" Mrs. Sanford asked at once. She knew his signs of emotion better than the telegraph girl.

"Why, I have another cable from Phil," he replied.

"Is he ill or hurt? Don't hold back—I want to know!"

"No, he's well. It isn't that. It's—well—it's asking our permission——"

"I know! He wants to fight!"

Now, how could she guess that? But she was an amazing woman, as he had often said.

"Yes." He passed the cablegram to her.

"I'm not surprised," she said, after reading it. "I'd been fearing it all along."

"Yes, he could not stand by and see such wrong done without wanting to strike his blow. I honour him for it."

"But he's Phil—the only boy we have!"

"I am leaving it to you," the Doctor concluded. "He will not if you say not."

"We'll think it over," said Mrs. Sanford.

When they broke silence and began a discussion of the pros and cons it was only to return to silence; for they were merely rehearsing the heads of trains of thought that occurred to both of them in a vicious circle. At the supper table Jane realised that something was wrong, and poignantly wrong.

"If it's about Phil," she blurted out, "I guess I'm entitled to know!"

When they told her, she said:

"Against that thieving Kaiser and for them poor little Belgians! He just couldn't help it! That's Phil all over. But it ain't the United States' war, it's Europe's; and all I've got to say is that maybe he'll never come back. He'll just

be killed and buried over in them furrin parts."

"We've thought of that, Jane," replied Mrs. Sanford.

"You're going to let him do it!" gasped Jane. "He won't, though, if you say not."

"Buried in furrin parts!" Jane repeated in fresh horror. This was the most awful aspect of it to her. If one insisted on being killed it ought to be at home, where he could be laid in the family plot.

After supper the Doctor and Mrs. Sanford went into the study, though it was early September and hot. There they sat silent as the flow of still waters which run deep.

"I leave it to you and to him," she said quietly, after a time.

Dr. Sanford hunted in his desk and found a telegraph blank, and rapidly in his fine, small hand which was suggestive of his mental self-possession when he had a pen between his fingers, he wrote:

"Yes, by Jehovah, fight if your heart is in the cause and you are not fighting for fighting's sake."

After Mrs. Sanford, who had been sitting very still, had read it she nodded. The decision was made. It takes such occasions as this to prove that fortitude still survives in quiet people who live on quiet village streets.

Before going to bed Dr. Sanford wrote to the vicar of Truckleford:

"It has been our aim to teach Phil self-reliance and to decide for himself. He is going to fight for the same kind of a cause that the ancestor fought for, this time with the British. He is very far away from us, but we are happy to think that he will have a second home with you."

He showed the letter to Mrs. Sanford, who approved it.

As soon as Phil received the cable he moved on the War Office. As he approached that enormous pile of stone he felt his inconsequence and quizzically wondered if anybody had ever laughed inside its solemn halls. Would the General whom Phil had met on the train see him? An august person who attended at the door allowed him to write his name on a slip of paper, and after a while a messenger conducted him to the General's office, through the long, gloomy corridors, which seemed to protest against the activity which the war had brought.

The General was doing the work of five men because there were so few officers who knew how to do that kind of work and trying, English fashion, not to make any show of it, in order to preserve his appearance of poise and leisureliness. He asked Phil what his training had been and then stepped into an adjoining room, where

he spoke to another general. The door had been left open, so that the other general could look over the slim figure, with its well-moulded features, which stood awaiting the result.

"Rather got me, his wanting to fight, so different from the usual soldier of fortune type," he said. "Nice chap, well set up, from one of the great American colleges. Just the man for the guns. That *attaché* fellow said he came from good old stock, which you can see for yourself."

He returned, after the other general had written the name of Philip Sanford on a sheet of paper, to say that Philip Sanford would be gazetted a second lieutenant of artillery. They were making second lieutenants rapidly at the War Office in those days. Phil did not know anything about guns, but, then, he knew as much as many other second lieutenants of artillery.

"You will get word when and where to report," said the General. "And jolly fine of you, I must say!"

The thing was done; no turning back, now. The next step was to send a cable announcing his decision to his employer, who replied:

"Go ahead. We'll keep your job for you!"

CHAPTER XXIV

HELEN ARRIVES

PHIL enclosed his father's cablegram in a letter to the vicar of Truckleford, which was answered by a telegram reminding him that he was expected "home" very soon. With only thirty-six hours which he could call his own before he reported for duty, he set out by the early afternoon train. He had bought all the textbooks of gunnery that he could find in the shops, and had sat up cramming the previous night. Four of them were in his bag and one was under his arm, along with some magazines that he had bought at the stall, as he followed the porter down the platform of the station.

His recollection of all that had happened since he had taken that same train two months ago was startled by one of the associations of the first journey in the life entering a compartment just ahead of him. Helen Ribot, too, was going to Truckleford. He wondered how he should interpret her start, with its long-drawn "Oh!" at sight of him; but she hastened to make her own interpretation when she had recovered from her surprise.

"It's the first time I've been down," she said, "and I'm going only for a day, as I'm very busy and living regularly in London, now."

There was a cheery tone of independence in the closing statement, for statement it was. In the midst of war Miss Helen Ribot had made her own start in the world. Then some common-places. Yes, her mother was still at Truckleford and Henriette with her. Both were well. Had he heard from home? Yes, it looked as if the Germans had made a decided stand on the Aisne.

"I see that you are prepared to read. So am I," she concluded pleasantly, as she took a book out of her bag.

Puzzled by this new Helen, so poised and affable but somehow uncousinly, there was nothing to do but follow her suggestion. As he turned the leaves of one of the big illustrated weeklies he noted something so distinctively familiar with the first glance at the double page, that he would have recognised a single figure of the drawing of the Germans in retreat from the Marne, without having the confirmation of Helen Ribot's signature in the lower right-hand corner.

"Caught!" he exclaimed triumphantly, as he turned the page about and held it up before her. "The fell secret of Mervaux revealed to the public at large! Congratulations!"

Helen lowered her head, flushing at this accusing broadside of publicity staring her in the face,

while he was as happy as if the picture were his own.

"It's corking!" he said.

"Yes, the agent liked it, and he has sold others, too," she said, looking up, the magic of the whole business in her eyes. "And they want more. Think of that! And the agent is going to send them to America and thinks that they will sell there!"

It would be false to say that Helen was over set-up with her success; but she was human. Better, that double page was a token of freedom earned and gained. Henceforth, she could be herself.

"Cartoons, too!" she added, when she saw how interested he was. "They particularly want cartoons, some of the editors. I did a series of that old von Stein after I showed him one of you knocking von Eichborn down."

"Good heavens! You——" Would print it, he was going to say, but broke off, for she was laughing in a way that saved him from gulping down the bait.

"But I'm not going to sell any cartoons unless I need to in order to pay the rent. I mean, it spoils the fun I get out of them."

"So we are earning our own living, now," he said. His admiration was transparent. He had earned his and knew what it meant to get a start.

Helen nodded.

"I've got forty pounds already to go with the thousand francs. Let's see, that is almost four hundred dollars in American money! I'm a proud wage-earner and even consider becoming a bloated bond-holder!"

She was smiling and laughing all the time, this changed, this free Helen, still uncousinly, a person apart, and buoyantly happy—until she caught a glimpse of herself in the small panel mirror opposite. Then her features relaxed.

"And you?" she asked, putting out her hand for her book, which she had laid on the seat. "Have you got passage back to America yet?"

"No. I——" And he told her briefly what he had done.

With the very announcement, the mirror warning and another warning which sprang from the memory of the scene under the tree at Mervaux were forgotten in the impulse which made her lean across the aisle in passionate interest.

"It was like you!" she exclaimed. "The old father and mother at home, what did they say?" She wanted to know all about it. "And Peter Smithers?" she added.

"Not heard from yet," Phil replied. "It's surprising how you recollect Peter."

"I'd like to make a cartoon of Peter; I don't know why, for I've never heard a dozen sentences about him. And in the artillery! Then you'll be doing the sort of thing we watched the

soixante-quinze doing at Mervaux. And you're a real sub-lieutenant! Aren't you proud?"

"Oh, fit to burst!"

"And you will be ordering people about and others will be ordering you about," she continued, returning to the mischievous vein. "I shall have to make another cartoon of how our newest subaltern looked to himself the first time he had on his uniform and how he felt when the general came to inspect his battery for the first time."

Just then it occurred to Helen that she had talked enough; but it had not occurred to her to tell him that she had put her name down on a list which would ensure her wearing a uniform and working in a hospital—she who dreaded the sight of blood. No, this was her business. Now she took up her book again with a sense of relief, and settled well down in the corner of the seat, as if to make herself as small as possible. She held the book well up, her lowered lashes just showing above the cover's edge.

Phil glanced up from his artillery cramming at times to find her still reading, or, if she were looking away from the page, it was out of the window, unconscious of his presence. At such moments her eyes would open wide as some object interested her vividly, most vividly for an instant, seeing pictures, making pictures, always. A fine nobility about the forehead; indeed, a

beautiful forehead, with its rich, dark eyebrows under the crowning glory of the hair that seemed to hold the particles of sunlight that filtered through the glass, and small, delicately-shaped ears set close to the head. There was more in that head than he had ever guessed. Only a small part of its infinite variety came out of the fingers' ends on to white paper.

Why he did not know, but the scene under the tree came into his mind. Her abounding sense of humour could not resist the trick when he was making that serious, patternlike lover's speech which he swore he would never make again in the same way. She had had the best of many jokes on him, whether the irresistible mood of mischief possessed her to make a cartoon or to draw him gazing lovelorn into Henriette's face. For it had not occurred to him what she thought must be so palpable—the true character of that "Yes," which excoriated her whenever she was with him alone.

He glanced at the drawing on the open page at his side, took it up to look at it again, amazed afresh at its quality and atmospheric reality, and put it down without attracting her attention. She was happy; she had succeeded in the one thing she cared for. It was pleasant to be there opposite her in her triumph on this September day, flying past English hedges, thinking of many things, including the destiny that had sent him to Europe

on a holiday to become a soldier; and it was with a touch of regret that he noted a landmark which told him that the train was drawing into Truckleford. She slipped the book back in her bag and the face he saw was that of the plain Helen, singularly dull and lifeless till she drew a sigh and in her eyes appeared a peculiar light, as she explained:

"Here we are at last!"

Mrs. Sanford, as well as the vicar and Henriette, was on the platform to welcome him; but Madame Ribot had found the weather quite too warm for walking. Henriette waved her hand as she smiled her welcome when the train ran past them. The vicar took Phil's hand in his and held it affectionately in a long clasp; and Mrs. Sanford flushed when he kissed her.

"We are very proud!" she murmured. "But we fear that we have done wrong in not trying to prevent it."

"But his father said 'Yes, by Jehovah!'" put in the vicar. He did not tell Phil that he was having that telegram framed to hang under the portrait of the ancestor.

Henriette and Helen were left to follow, as the vicar and his wife took possession of Phil.

"Oh, we've heard all about it from Henriette!" said Mrs. Sanford. "And—and I must confess that what I particularly liked was the way that you knocked that beast of a Prussian down."

"Yes," said the vicar, stiffening out of his usual stoop and stopping. "But what was it? I am very curious. Er—I boxed a little myself when I was young. Just a straight lead with the right?"

"No," said Phil, turning and holding up his finger at Henriette. "I've a bone to pick with you for telling!"

"Later!" she smiled back.

"If not a straight lead with the right, what was it?" persisted the vicar.

"An upper cut to the jaw!" Phil murmured awkwardly.

"Very effectual, always!" replied the vicar.

"Now, he was standing about like this, and you ducked like this to let his blow by?"

"My dear, this is positively shocking!" gasped his wife, mindful that they were in the village street at the time.

"Then you gave it to him like this——" and there the vicar of Truckleford brought his fist up in correct fashion and pressed it against the correct section of Phil's physiognomy. "Exactly!" he concluded, chuckling. "I remember once I used it in a little row—before I had taken orders, my dear, before I had taken orders!"

When they turned in at the vicarage gate they found Madame Ribot at ease on a lawn chair in the shade near the tea-table, looking as charm-

ing as usual and with a novel on her lap as usual.

"Now I may thank you in person for the part of a brave gentleman that you have played!" she said to Phil in her delightful way. "And you, my truant Helen, you've found time to come and see your mother, too," she added, as she embraced Helen.

"But have you seen this?" demanded Phil when all were seated around the tea-table. "We have a distinguished person with us. I had the honour of riding down in the train with her from London—with none other than that celebrated artist who is now sipping tea out of a cup just like any everyday person."

He held up the double page for all to see. Helen continued to look into her teacup as they passed the picture around.

"Very timely! Just what the editors wanted," said Henriette. "I'm so glad, Helen!"

Madame Ribot seemed most surprised of all at the actuality of the thing. She drew a long breath of realising satisfaction.

"And you did this in the midst of all that shell-fire, you poor dear—I mean——" exclaimed Mrs. Sanford.

"Oh, I don't mind being called poor dear!" said Helen in a soft, impersonal way. "What a bad-tempered person I have been!" she added.

The vicar rose from his chair and went over

to Helen, taking her hand in his and patting her on the head. In his heart he had ever been as fond of Helen as had General Rousseau, though fondness for Helen was not the fashion among the friends of the Ribots. A little success had made her almost important.

"And the shell that hit between us, did you hear about that?" Phil went on.

"No," said the vicar. "Henriette didn't mention that. What about it? We heard how Helen fainted when she saw the wounded soldier."

"No fainting this time—a coal box, bang in our faces! I thought that our artist was gone forever."

"If you keep this up," said Helen, "you will make people think that it was I who was the hero of the movies and knocked the villain down; and in that event I shall have to publish the cartoon of you doing it as documentary evidence to the contrary. Beware of the power of the press!"

He had won one of her laughs and a full tilt of challenge from her eyes.

"And who cried good and clapped her hand?" he asked.

"The assembled hero-worshipping multitude!" she replied.

For the moment in their banter they had taken possession of the conversation. Suddenly Helen realised it. She had been teased and she was

giving him as good as he sent. The smile died on her lips; the flame out of her eyes. She was plain Helen drinking tea in silence and wishing that she was not there. When her mother made some remark, she slipped away into the house and out by a side entrance into the lane, glad to be alone.

It had all passed by the ears of the vicar and his wife as young people's nonsense, pleasant to hear. These two could think of only one thing: the fact of Phil's presence; the fact that there was a Sanford to fight for the cause.

As he turned to Henriette, Madame Ribot was watching, while pretending to look at the pictures in the weekly. She wanted to know the effect of the ten days which they had spent at the chateau together. Scarcely perceptible the set frown on her brow, which was only erased when an automobile stopped at the gate. Madame Ribot liked the low purring of costly motors. It was as rich and delectable to her as the rustling of silk.

The Marquis of Truckleford had come to see the vicar about Belgian refugee plans and other war work, which, for the first time in weeks, had not been the principal topic of conversation at the vicarage tea-table. Phil was not used to meeting marquises; few work on construction gangs in the Southwest or are seen in New England villages. He did not know how you "My Lorded" or "Your Graced" them, or whatever

it was, or how often; but he talked to the Marquis without self-consciousness, just as he would to any other human being, and the results seemed quite satisfactory. The Marquis inquired about the identity of the general whom Phil had seen at the War Office.

"So Duggy made you a second lieutenant!" said the Marquis. "Sound chap! So, so! I'll write a letter about you to Starrow, who is a peg above Duggy. Must say I liked the way that you knocked that Hun down. The vicar and I were puzzled. What was it, a straight lead with the right?"

"No, an upper cut, like this!" interrupted the vicar, giving another exhibition of how it was done.

"Just as I said from the start!" declared His Lordship. "Pleased the old chap in the frame in the dining-room, wouldn't it?"

CHAPTER XXV

HENRIETTE WAITS

AT dinner Phil was seated again under the English ancestor, only to find that this did not mean an escape from ancestors, as he was facing the American. The vicar had had the photograph of the statue at Longfield framed, and on the opposite side of the room the man of Massachusetts seeking the blood of British red-coats was charging toward the man of Hampshire, who, with uptilted chin, was defying all comers.

"At breakfast some morning you may find the table overturned, chairs broken and the dining-room all gory," Phil said.

"Really!" gasped Mrs. Sanford. She was so serious about the ancestors that at first she took him literally.

"The American is better dressed for such an affair," Phil continued, "but I fancy that the Briton did his fighting in shirt-sleeves, too. He was in that ornate get-up only when he posed for his portrait."

"They would both be in shirt-sleeves for this cause!" declared the vicar.

"Yes, and perhaps for the cause for which the American fought, too," Phil suggested.

"Very likely. I am proud of them both!" said the vicar.

But he and Mrs. Sanford were proudest of the living Sanford who was going to fight in the cause of the moment. The hour was the living hour of blows. Here was one who was about to strike a blow for a childless pair, who had never so much wanted a son as then in order that they might give him for their country. A son of their blood had come to them, now. They wanted to know more about him, his boyhood, his school-days, and the campaigns of the revolutionary ancestor—everything that put links in the chain of inheritance. Phil complied when he realised the genuineness of their interest, but found himself stumbling in details.

"Father knows everything he did," he said.

"In fact, we have his diary; but I confess——"

"Too much ancestor!" put in Helen.

It was the first that she had spoken, and even this exclamation was casual and disinterested. Seated across from him as she had been at the first dinner, her plain part in her plain gown was much the same as then, only she was more subdued. Henriette was by his side, in the same part of beautiful woman and beautiful gown. She added her questions to the vicar's. Madame Ribot's only question was about Peter Smithers.

"We must get him to Europe," she said, when the vicar and Mrs. Sanford were declaring that now Phil's father and mother would surely come to England on their long-promised visit.

"I'd like to see Peter in Europe," said Phil.

"So should I!" declared Helen irresistibly. "I should like to have seen him having a set-to with von Stein."

What a cartoon! A whole series of Peter Smithers in moods of rage and humility; Peter shaking his fist; Peter threatened with firing squads and blank walls; Peter and old von Stein—there you had a contrast! Her eyes were dancing; she was laughing to herself as the pictures flitted before her vision, only to bite her lip when she noticed her mother's stare and lapse into the marking-time attitude which she had planned to take her through the meal.

"Yes, of course we must invite Peter," said Madame Ribot. "Do write to Dr. Sanford about it."

"Do, please!" chimed in Henriette.

The vicar was looking to Phil for his lead in the matter.

"By all means!" he said.

Just then his glance happened to meet Helen's, and hers seemed to convey a repressed irony, which melted into that blankness of expression with its self-effacement that always puzzled him.

Always the artist—always changing, he thought, while Henriette's charm was unvarying.

"And you will stay on here?" he said to Henriette.

"No. I, too, am going to do my bit," she replied.

She was to take a course in nursing and go to France with Lady Truckleford's hospital unit.

"You were so good at binding up the wounded soldier's arm in the gully that I foresee a great success," said Phil.

She flushed slightly, averting her glance. Always her blushes were accompanied by the appropriate manner and gesture. When she looked back at him her face was in repose, her lips parted faintly, her eyes deep wells of grateful recollection—the Henriette whom he had carried from the roadside to the gully.

"We shall both be in France," she said; "you fighting and I nursing—both doing our bit."

In that deliciously pregnant second before she took a last sip of coffee her smile implied more than her words.

When they went out on the lawn Madame Ribot asked Helen to fetch a shawl, and after she had placed its silken folds around her mother's shoulders she slipped away into the darkness, the others in their preoccupation not missing her. Madame Ribot at ease in a long chair, the others walked up and down until again came a motor's purr to

the gateway and Lady Truckleford appeared to talk of war relief. She was bubblingly talkative, was Lady Truckleford, delightfully fussed over her hospital project, and demonstrative over Henriette, who seemed to have won her affections completely. It was quite late when she departed.

"We'll renew that walk to-morrow, shall we?" Henriette said to Phil as they parted on the stairs. While she was undressing her mother came into the room.

"You were very beautiful to-night, dearie," said Madame Ribot, taking her daughter's hands in hers. "And it's settled between you and Cousin Phil?"

Henriette smiled.

"That means that it is?"

Again Henriette smiled, in a confident way.

"It is!" said Madame Ribot. "Well——" and she kissed Henriette good-night, closing the scene without further inquiry, as became a wise woman who knew or thought she knew her daughter. "It's splendid about Helen," she added, pausing in the doorway.

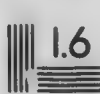
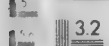
"Very!" Henriette replied. "Yes, she's found her place drawing for the press."

Helen, who had thought that she had conquered happiness, was far from it. She had cried out to her mirror: "Oh, if it weren't for that nose I wouldn't be such a fright!" only to call herself a



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fool. The result of her conflicting emotions was to hurry downstairs and look up the railroad timetables. Then she went to her mother's room, a pale, distrait figure of impatience, with face drawn.

"I'm going to take the seven-o'clock train in the morning," she said. "It's my work, you see."

She had come quite close to her mother's side so abruptly that it was disturbing to her mother's composure.

"You know best about that," said Madame Ribot, looking up at Helen's features with a return of the old wonder that Helen should be her child.

"Please explain and say good-bye to the others, won't you?"

"Yes. And, Helen, it's all settled between Henriette and Cousin Phil, isn't it?"

"If she wishes."

"If she wishes! What do you mean by that?" Madame Ribot had turned in her chair with a penetrating glance from her little eyes.

"Why, what I say. But I don't know. I——" Helen wavered.

"You were with them all the time at the chateau?"

"Yes. If she wishes," was all that Helen could say, her voice crackling in its dryness.

"That she has not wished it on other occa-

sions. I see!" murmured Madame Ribot. "She does this time."

"Good-bye!"

"Good-bye! You've done wonderfully, Helen. Of course, it is better than nursing if you continue to make it go. You see, I was anxious about you if anything happened to me."

"And I've been very trying sometimes. I'm sorry!"

There was something whose place even successful drawings for the press could not supply—affection. Helen was singularly hungry for it to-night.

"Of course you will write us and come down to see us!" said Madame Ribot.

"Of course!" Helen repeated.

She wished to be taken into her mother's arms, but it did not happen. And she was glad when the dawn, which found her awake, came and she softly glided downstairs on her way to the station.

Peter Smithers on his "little farm" in Massachusetts, walking about and surveying the latest improvements and his high-bred cattle and swine, was hardly conscious that a woman leisurely undoing her hair in a vicarage in Truckleford was thinking of him. He had a fortune, poor man; and he was not unused to being the object of plots as the result of its possession. In her day Madame Ribot had been as fond of spinning

webs of intrigue as she had of late the threads of recollection which had helped to pass the time.

"Phil will come out of this war with European habits formed," she thought. "His Longfield will seem very tame to him, then. He may win distinction—but his family is enough. The one other thing needful"—it was the thing that Peter Smithers had. As a loving and dutiful mother her part was clear. "Peter Smithers must be brought to Europe; and then I——" Madame Ribot smiled at herself in the mirror, conscious that a long lapse of inaction need not necessarily have weakened her powers. She could already hear the soft purr of Peter Smithers's powerful car at the gate.

Nor did Peter, looking through the hothouses of that miserable little farm of his, know that the two white heads of an English vicar and his wife were thinking of him.

"That ten days in the chateau seem to have had one result, unless my eyes deceive me," said the vicar in a half-whisper, as if the secret held back for this family conclave might be overheard by the walls.

"You saw it, too?" said Mrs. Sanford. "Of course, as a woman I saw it at once. And, Franklin, don't forget about inviting Peter Smithers. Hasn't it all turned out wonderfully! And Helen, too!"

"Oh, it's ripping about Helen, ripping!" ex-

claimed the vicar. "That little warrior! I always believed in her."

"But her mother did seem to me anything but appreciative."

"She never is, except when she is ordering people about."

"Yes, so I've found!" assented Mrs. Sanford.

"And you have done your best to make her happy in that respect," said the vicar.

"It's the easiest way, my dear, and she is our guest."

The next day the two did not allow any interruption from them to interfere with Henriette's walk with Phil, but rather gave their blessing of smiles. Henriette set the direction, which was to the same hill as before; and the quiet scene of Hampshire valleys in September had an appeal to him that it had not had before the war. For a remote ancestor of his had fought for this as the later one had fought for his New England valleys.

"I feel the call of both this and France," said Henriette. "How can one think of painting!" Indeed, the portrait lay with its back against the wall at Mervaux. She had forgotten to bring it and had never been more dissatisfied with anything that she had done.

The spell of the art in which she really excelled was upon Phil; a deeper one than ever, owing to her more serious mood and the serious busi-

ness before him, and it grew all the way from valley to hilltop and afterward in the leisurely descent. He spoke of his fortune. All he had was his pay as a second lieutenant.

"You have fortune enough," she said, pausing and giving him a long, full glance; "the fortune of war! It is the same that it always has been. The man goes away to fight!"

"And the woman waits!" he said.

"Yes, she waits!" she replied. Her smile was gentle and wonderful. "Isn't that enough?" she asked, giving him her hand in a prolonged clasp and then turning her cheek for the pressure of his lips.

"Quite!" he agreed.

She liked the way of it much better than a speech in the moonlight. Anything but that!

CHAPTER XXVI

A DIRECT HIT

THE letter which the Marquis of Truckleford wrote to the general who was a peg above "Duggy" gave Phil an early introduction to Flanders mud. An upstanding man the major to whom he reported. Fresh from the retreat of Mons and the fighting on the Aisne, he had been brought home to mould human clay into gunners. Then there was Jaffers, the regular sergeant, who regarded all recruits as children of his strict parenthood. Treating fledgling young officers with the respect due to their rank, he would whisper to them the right thing to do, the while he stood stiff at the salute.

"They will learn fast under fire," said Jaffers. "It's the blooming Boche shells that'll teach them to be quick about their lessons!"

By the hundred of thousands untrained men were drilling and waiting for uniforms and rifles. Every time that a gun was finished or a shell came out of the shops, a thousand hungry hands seemed to reach across the Channel for it. Phil became one of a myriad of units in a tiny orbit; a cog in one of the many little organisations

which were to be assembled into a whole. His technical training stood him in good stead. At first, the battery drilled with heirlooms of the Victorian epoch, which might be useful for home defence against a bow-and-arrow invasion.

Then, one day somebody in the War Office signed a paper which meant that four tubes of steel were to give all the horse-drill and men-drill of Phil's battery a proud reality. New four-inch howitzers could not be kept long away from France in those days. They were needed in the Ypres salient, where the British were holding on by their teeth with their faces to the Germans and their backs to Calais.

Phil's letters about his daily existence ought to have cured an old pair in Longfield of any idea that he was fighting the whole war himself according to the methods of the revolutionary ancestor; though his mother to this day has never been convinced to the contrary. "Mud—and shells at the Germans and from the Germans; and more mud, a great deal more mud, and more shells at the Germans and more from the Germans," was the way that he described it. "I know that I shall never choose to spend a winter holiday in Flanders after the war is over," he said.

The business of the gunners was to hide their "hows" from prying German eyes by land and air and on telephone summons to pump destruc-

tion at some unseen point on the map, according to tabular calculations. At other times they might walk about in the mud or sit in the mud inside their dug-outs. It was enough to make a bold knight of olden story, who carried a Toledo or a Damascus blade, fall in a fit, as Phil remarked. Should the Germans locate them, a tornado of "krumps" descended on their position and they sat in the dug-outs considering whether or not everybody there would be "done in," as the English say, by a direct hit.

Then they moved to another place through the mud and built more dug-outs in the mud and began the daily grind over again, the vacancies caused by casualties being filled by recruits. But they had intervals in billets, where they crowded together in peasants' houses out of the zone of shell-fire, and smoked and read and waited for the mail, and expatiated on how it would seem to have a real bath in a real tub in a land where there was no mud.

Spring did come, though there were soldiers in the British army who thought that it never would. They could not comprehend how anything so pleasant could ever happen in war time in Flanders. It found Phil with a bit of white and blue ribbon on his blouse, which had been given for what other people, including a division commander, said was a gallant deed showing exceptional initiative. He was willing to accept their

view as official, though he could not honestly agree with it. However, it was the source of enormous happiness in Longfield and Truckleford.

Once he had been back at Truckleford on leave for a week; and, after the mud, he did not mind if the vicar and Mrs. Sanford made as much fuss over him as if he were a real hero. Madame Ribot had returned to Paris. He had seen neither Henriette nor Helen, though Henriette wrote to him regularly. She was at one of the hospital bases not more than three hours' motor ride away; but if he had had ten motors he could not have gone to see her. Each tiny cog of the machine must keep in its place. None may go moving about at will.

He came to watch for Henriette's handwriting and the postmarks of Longfield as the two links with the world; and Truckleford had also become a part of his existence. Henriette seemed the adjutant of Lady Truckleford, devoted to her work. Her letters ever revived the thousand pictures of her from Truckleford to Mervaux and back again and the spirit of them was expressed in the words: "The woman waits while the man goes out to fight." Her references to Helen, who seemed to be at the same base but with another unit, were the only news he had of the other cousin except her drawings, which continued to appear in the weeklies.

Helen, Henriette said, was still trying to get used to the sight of blood.

People were coming to know Helen's name. Phil wrote to her in congratulation and the answer he received hardly invited further correspondence. It was unlike her, uncousinly, and it troubled him. She was very busy and very happy. She made a point of that—very happy. New memories of Mervaux occurred to him with the peculiar distinctness of details appearing, after what seemed a long lapse of time, with the freshness of sudden discovery in some recess of the mind. He was thinking that he should not mind sitting again for his portrait on the terrace, with Henriette smiling at her easel and Helen laughing over her cartoons of his proud career.

Spring not only came to Flanders, but the mud dried; the fields were carpeted with the tender green of young grain, and the canopies of foliage gave better cover for the "hows." Green, yes, but flat that vista from the gun-positions, while the graceful slopes of the Berkshires might be dripping and glistening as they had on the afternoon that he returned from the Southwest. Bill Hurley was at his accustomed place on the station platform, no doubt; Hanks, the druggist, was still branching out, no doubt. But Truckleford had the greater call of the two for him that day; for he had received a letter that his father and mother had at last undertaken their pilgrimage and had

arrived at the vicarage, where they were waiting until he had another week's leave.

Another bit of news, too. Peter Smithers, without any warning to the War Lord, was about to visit Europe to see things for himself. Peter's only expressed view of Phil's action in going to war had been:

"About what you would expect. I gave him up long ago. So Ledyard's keeping the job for him—hm-m-m! Well, Ledyard's business isn't the sport of a lot of jockeying politicians."

Sometimes Phil had thought what if a shell should take off an arm or a leg, or otherwise maim him for life. Hundreds of thousands of others had thought the same. The merciful bullet through the heart or the wound that heals leaving one whole—these are a part of the game. But that jagged, tearing piece of shell-fragment—this was the devil of the new psychology of war.

It was a glorious morning that he went up to the trench to take his turn at observation. The sun made the wings of the planes overhead shimmer with silver and gold under a fleckless sky. The birds were singing their song in the midst of the song of bullets. It hardly seemed possible that death could lurk in the soft puffs of shrapnel smoke playing around the planes. Death should have no part in such a day. It was a day of life. Soft air to breathe, gentle breezes, kindly sunshine, and youth. Phil enjoyed the fact of

existence as some superb privilege which deserved gratitude to earth and sky, and particularly to the sky, which was all that he could see as he entered the winding communication trench.

"Good-morning!"

The cheery greetings were exchanged between fellow-officers as if the game were not with death, but with racquets on an English lawn.

"They are strafing a bit up there," said one; which meant that there was some shelling in the front line, where little mirrors were set up on parapets of sandbags. Through these bits of glass you could look out on a field of weeds across to another line of sandbags, Britain burrowing on one side and Germany on the other of No Man's Land. Phil took the place of another lieutenant at the O. P., or Observation Post. Here he was in touch by telephone with his battery. He watched black bursts of smoke, which were the shells from its guns, and reported their proximity to the target. It was a matter of eyesight and judgment and speaking into a black disk—nothing dramatic about it.

Since he was at Mervaux he had learned much about those bursts of black smoke. He had seen many men knocked over by them. One monster had come even closer to him than the shell which had exploded between him and Helen, and on that occasion he had been dug out from under a tumbled parapet with a spade. When the Ger-

mans increased their shell-fire on any section of the British trenches, the British increased theirs on the Germans; then, in turn, the Germans increased theirs and the British increased theirs. Thus it happened on this particular morning, perhaps because the light was good for artillery observation. He was not looking to see what the German shells did to the British trench, but what his shells were doing to the German trench! "Right on!" He had announced the result of a shot when he heard the hurtling, growing scream of a nine-inch coming straight toward him.

After that the end of all sensation; oblivion, which had come to many another man from the burst of a nine-inch whether or not he ever awoke to life in this world.

After he knew not how long Phil felt some one pulling at his body, which seemed to rest under a great weight. This was all, and this only for a fleeting moment; he was uncertain whether he was in this world or the other. Then he was bumped against something and felt his hand brush the hard earth. Vaguely he reasoned that stretcher-bearers were carrying him around the traverse of a trench. A hot, moist sponge seemed pressed into his throat and something besides air was coming into his lungs and he was trying to cough it out. Utter darkness encompassed him and there was no sound.

All volition, all muscular and nerve-initiative

had been beaten out of him. He could only try to breathe through that hot sponge and to keep that other trickling thing out of his lungs. It was not his mind that made this effort; only a body detached from his mind, acting involuntarily like the flouncing of a fish out of water. He lost consciousness again before he realised where he was hit; and the litter-bearers bore him on to the casualty clearing station. They did not know whether or not he was dead. Sometimes cases like that were and sometimes they were not when they reached the station.

"Better be, though," said the one who had the rear handles of the stretcher.

"Yes. I'd want to be," said the man in front.

CHAPTER XXVII

A SMILING HELEN

THE War Office must foresee everything; that men must be drilled before they know how to fight and that when they fight some will be wounded. There must be experts in salvage as well as in preparation; depots to mend broken parts in the immense, complicated machine.

On a hillside where they would miss none of the rare winter sunshine, the summer breezes, or the tonic of fresh spring air, rows of long, green barracks had risen. Gravelled paths connected them between stretches of transplanted sod and geranium beds. Women in nurses' uniforms, and surgeons twiddling stethoscopes, and hospital corps attendants bearing trays of food, went along the paths. Sometimes the surgeons stopped to talk about this or that case, in their professional jargon. Some were youngsters who had not yet begun practice; others of the old regular service had looked after the health of Mr. Thomas Atkins in India and out-of-the-way places, where flies and mosquitoes are busy in tropical heat with their wicked occupations; and still others were grey-

haired, eminent specialists from London used to receive fees that gave the youngsters a giddy feeling, but now working for a lieutenant's pay. All the talent and skill of the medical and surgical world were at the service of this repair shop of damaged men.

Indoors the X-ray "sharp" was always busy locating bits of steel as black points on hazy photographs; still forms were wheeled into the operating-room so softly that it seemed as simple a business as slipping a paper into a drawer; the beds in the wards were in rows between a broad aisle, with screens moved here and there by the noiseless sleight-of-hand of nurses trained to their part no less than infantry in the use of the bayonet.

One of the nurse's duties is to smile. However tired she is she must smile, just as a soldier must salute and obey orders with alacrity. A smile in passing for the fellow with one eye showing through a swathe of bandages, for him with splinted legs held fast by weights, or the one dreamily convalescent, and particularly for the one quivering with pain. The man who awakes from a sweet sleep or the one who has been in a nightmare with a dozen machine-guns playing on him and bombs bursting all around, is greeted by a smile as he returns to the world of reality.

The nurse has life, strength, tenderness in her facile, confident attention to those who are without strength and dependent as children. She

makes each patient feel that he is the only one in the world, which is the way that patients like to feel. All the nurses without exception seemed good-looking, even the plain ones when you looked into their kindly eyes as they turned toward you.

The sometime tempery and the sometime morbid Helen was always smiling these days; smiling from the depths of her fine eyes as well as with her lips. Her personality glowed with opportunity and grew with it. Every day she worked so long and hard that when night came she fell asleep as soon as her head was on the pillow. This was good, too, as it prevented any fiends of melancholy from tugging at her heart.

It is not only surgery and medicines and leaving nature to do the rest, as the grey-haired specialists knew, which brings recovery; it is also the desire to live which surroundings may induce. There are perfectly good nurses with perfectly good smiles who do everything required of them, not to say that there are slack nurses and possibly nurses who flirt with young officers. Then, as in other walks of life, there is occasionally a person who has what one of the grey-haired specialists called the gift, when he spoke of Helen.

She had fancy, as we know, and she could put her fancy on paper with a quickness and sureness of stroke which had led M. Vaillant to think that she might do dry points. All the talent she had, all her heart, belonged to the wounded. She was

comrade to Mr. Atkins, whether rosy-cheeked boys of the "Kitcheners" or a stoical old regular, who accepted fighting as his job, had no home, and refused to be a hero.

"At first I didn't think you was what you'd call a beauty!" said one, who got red after he had blurted out the fact.

"I'm not. You've good eyesight," she replied.

"But now I think you're the most beautiful woman I've ever seen!" he added; and this statement was as honest as the first. It made Helen infinitely happy; for there was nothing that she so much desired in her inmost heart as to be good-looking.

She drew a long series of cartoons for that gallant who had been hung up in the barbed wire in the moonlight, played at bombs back and forth with the Germans around "Wipers," and been pulled out of mudholes and buried by shells. The cartoons were her best card in the pack of her hospital cheer. One anecdote illustrated called for another. Helen knew more about the life of the army in Flanders than the "brass hats," the staff and all the war correspondents. For these survivors of hell did not want gloomy pictures. Reality was enough without adding to its horrors that of long faces. They liked something to make them smile even when death was at their elbow. They sent her cartoons home in their letters, or if they had no homes, put the sheets away with

their treasures. One even cautioned his wife not to be jealous, because this jolly nurse drew cartoons for everybody; and he had the rank of major.

Helen kept on doing what she called real drawings, which were appearing the world around. Even the censors could not find any military secrets in them, particularly after she sent the chief censor a cartoon of her imaginary portrait of a censor in his most diabolical mood of evisceration. Some of the cartoons, too, got into print, bringing more requests from editors, which she could refuse now in view of the checks coming in for the real drawings. M. Vaillant, who had been wounded and was now convalescent, had gathered up some of the floating strands of his affairs and wrote his congratulations to Helen, hoping that she would not go to America after the war. Let America come to her in Paris.

"You are trying to swell my head," she wrote back; "and I do believe that it is a little larger. How can it help being!"

Nevertheless, that tugging at her heart would come at times. When she ought to be perfectly happy she was not, as she found whenever her work gave her a moment to search her inner self.

All this about Helen, when Henriette was just across the road with what the doctors and nurses in Helen's unit referred to as "Lady Truckleford's lot." Sometimes the doctors when they

looked in that direction said something almost profane about volunteer organisations and people who had influence. Lady Truckleford flitted back and forth to London, where she was on a number of boards and lists of patronesses without knowing what they were all about unless she asked honourable secretaries, which was a bore, as the honourable secretaries could not be along when somebody gave you a poser. However, she did not allow such details to disturb her placidity for long.

If you were a young officer whose people were of some account and you were only slightly wounded, "Lady Truckleford's lot" was a most delightful lot to be with; and in addition you were certain of attention from real trained nurses who were also a part of the establishment. In charming company you could sit in the same sun and breathe the same air as the convalescents of the professional unit and look out to sea and watch the boats coming and going across the channel; and you could also make trips in automobiles to the neighbouring seaside resort, where once French and English people came in the holidays of peace before the world's game was war. Aside from Henriette among Lady Truckleford's lot was Lady Violet Dearing, characterised by doll-like beauty and a lisp. She was poor and dependent on her friends; and despite her lisp and her attractiveness she had had no luck in making

any definite attachment though she was twenty-eight, which is a desperate age for doll-like beauties.

Occasionally Helen went to see Henriette; oftener, indeed, than Henriette came to see her sister. Once Helen made some cartoons for the young wounded officers at tea-time, who thought that they were "ripping." Lady Violet quite agreed with their view, but Henriette was cool to her sister when they parted. Helen made no more cartoons for Lady Truckleford's lot.

Gossip ran its rounds in this as in other communities. Lady Truckleford's lot knew that there was a young American by name of Sanford, who was Henriette's seventeenth cousin; and Lady Violet teased Henriette about the seventeenth cousin when she had been the object of too much attention from the young officers. If anybody who was somebody in the Truckleford world was wounded, the Truckleford lot soon knew it; and if he were interesting it was still possible, in those early days before the hideous old War Office became utterly inconsiderate of all the nicer human feelings, to have him transferred to "more congenial surroundings."

CHAPTER XXVIII

A "SITTING CASE"

"**Y**ES," murmured the doctor at the casualty clearing station, after he had listened to Phil's heartbeats and examined an opening in a bandage of gauze and cotton. "Yes, another one of the miracles. They say that the Boches in such cases——"

He wiped his brow, his sentence unfinished, as Phil gave another involuntary cough to keep the trickling thing out of his lungs. The appeal of nature, struggling for self-preservation, brought the doctor back to the definite.

"No chance if he is left lying down!" he exclaimed. "We'll make a sitting case of it. Hold him up all the way."

They lifted the limp figure into the ambulance, where two other sitting cases were waiting for further passengers.

"Now, you're off!"

The swift, kindly-springed ambulance sped on out of the zone of shell-fire along the hard roads between the avenues of poplars in the glorious sunshine.

Phil realised that some one was keeping him

from slipping and that he would slip and keep on slipping to the very bottom of things if left to himself. Little hammers were beating on his brain. Their tat-tat kept him from any continuity of thought. As soon as he had an idea they crushed it while it was only fluttering in vagueness. Indeed, they moved about over his brain on the lookout to crush any conscious grasp of anything. He would outwit them; he would know what all this was about. Straining his eyelids open—they were as heavy as steel doors—there was only a black curtain in front of his eyes as the reward of the effort. This must mean—but the hammers would not let him find out what it meant. He tried to listen and there was a void beaten by noiseless hammers which were striking into pulp—his brain. He was afraid of something; something ghastly indefinable.

Again he was slipping. He would just let himself slip. That was best. When you slipped the hammer-blows became muffled. They did not hurt so much; only when you slipped you had to cough to keep back the trickling thing. The strong arm of the hospital corps man straightened him up. Apparently some one did not want him to slip. This must be the man who ran the hammers and wanted to keep them busy—those noiseless, merciless hammers in the black night.

"It's lucky just to get it in the leg," said one of the two sitting cases opposite, with a red spot

on a white wrapping showing through his slit trousers' leg.

"Bang in the middle of the head's better than that," said the other, who had his arm in a sling.

"God, yes!"

Up and down hill the ambulance, its green curtains drawn on its secrets, ran smoothly on past the long trains of motor-trucks that fed the army, past well-muscled, comely, eager, whistling, and singing youth on the march, through villages and towns, through the orderly world of health and action to that quiet world where the nurses smiled, inside the long, low buildings connected by gravelled paths.

Phil knew that he had arrived because he had been lifted down from somewhere to something, which was a signal for the hammers to do a snare-drum dance which made him unconscious for a moment. The hammers did not like him to be unconscious. Having beaten him out of consciousness, they beat him back to it with a different kind of tattoo. Then, he was being carried along in a sort of cradle.

"Keep his head up!" said the little ticket which came with all who were sent to the human repair shop.

"Very particular about that!" insisted the tired medical corps man, who had held Phil up for the whole journey.

Phil had only the sense of being laid on some-

thing soft, with his shoulders propped up against something still softer. Then they were taking off his clothes. These people were very kind, but they could not stop the hammers; nothing could. Perhaps they would let him slip down, down, down, on that downy pillow till the hammers stopped. He would tell them about the hammers; then they would understand why he wanted to slip. So he tried to speak, though he was uttering only a gurgle and he could not have heard his own voice if he had been articulate. The hammers were drowning his voice with their beat. They did not mean to let him slip. If he could not hear his own voice, how could he expect the kind people to hear it?

A young surgeon used his stethoscope; then waited on his superior, Dr. Smythe, to come before attempting any redressing.

"An eighth of an inch more would have done it!" said Dr. Smythe, as they removed the bandages. "Why not the fraction? It would have been more merciful."

"The Boches, they say, in such cases——" began the young doctor.

"We can't—and won't!" was the reply of the senior.

Phil felt that the hot sponge had been removed. He could breathe more freely. More air in his lungs revived him. Shooting pains ran out in forked tongues from the hammer-beats, bringing

an acute consciousness of why the sponge had been there. His hand went up involuntarily, quickly, on its mission of discovery. The doctors, realising his purpose, reached for it in common impulse, to save him from the truth, but too late. The sense he had left, that of touch as acute as ever, felt the moist and fractured horror. His arm hung a dead weight in the surgeons' grip as they laid it back by his side on the cot. His brain had been struck another stunning blow, such as it had received from the shell. It rebounded with wild consciousness as he tried to lift himself forward in delirious effort. But a strong hand was pressing his forehead; other strong hands were forcing him back into place. The hand on his forehead said to him: "It is useless; you cannot." And the hammers had it, there in that soundless, dumb, sightless world of torture.

Now he must pretend to yield; yes, he must keep one thing in mind. They might hold his head up, but this would not prevent him from slipping. He would will that he should slip and keep on willing it till he reached the bottom of things. Yes, that had been done before and he could do it. They could not make him live under the hammers—live for such a monstrous future as he foresaw. Yes, just will it and it would not take long to die; no, not long—a few hours, perhaps. He was sure of this. Beat on, hammers, while you may; the harder, the sooner the end.

"It's a chance for Bricktop to make good," said Dr. Smythe. "We've heard so much of his wonders. Send for him."

Already word had passed through the ward and even across the way to Lady Truckleford's lot that there was a terrible case at Number Four, gunner officer, named Sanford. It reached Henriette when she was at tea and Helen when she was at her quarters off duty and drawing. The young doctor who had gone for Bricktop met them coming in at the door and noted their startled, anxious faces.

Henriette leading, they came down the aisle. When Dr. Smythe, whose form hid Phil, drew aside and Henriette saw what lay against the white pillow she screamed and placed both hands over her eyes to hide the sight and turned away, reeling and shuddering.

"Let me go!" she cried, stumbling toward the door.

"The screen!" exclaimed Dr. Smythe.

Helen, too, had her hands over her eyes; she, too, was shuddering but not moving. She brought her hands down with a kind of wrench, stiffened her chin, and then stepped behind the screen.

"Cousin Phil!" she said, striving to keep her voice steady—and she saw that his glazed eyes were sightless.

"He is quite deaf from shell-shock, too!" said Dr. Smythe.

So this was Helen's cousin; therefore, Henriette's.

For a moment she was silent, with deep breaths, as if between impulses, before she dropped down beside the cot. Those hammers could not prevent Phil from knowing that a woman's hand was grasping his, a soft palm and slim fingers were pressing his tight, as if they would send a current of cheer through him. She could do that when he was so monstrous! If only the shell had finished him. With her other hand she was rolling up his sleeve; then she slipped her left hand in place of the right in his. Dr. Smythe and the nurse in attendance looked on in a spell of tragic curiosity.

Now Phil felt a finger moving on his arm. Sensitive little nerves—he had never known that there were such sensitive ones—followed the movement and carried the sense of their progress to the brain in spite of the hammers.

"I am trying to write so you will understand," she slowly traced the letters. "If you do, two pressures of the hand is yes."

"Yes," came the signal.

"He does!" said Helen, smiling up to Dr. Smythe in triumph.

"Ripping!" he said.

She repeated the message aloud, firmly, confidently, as she slowly wrote:

"I have good news. You will recover your

hearing, speech, and sight completely. We have a miracle man here who will make you whole again, just the same that you were before except for a few little scars that will go away. You must just want to get well, in order to give the miracle man his chance and for the sake of your father and mother and those who love you." And after the last word she hesitated, then wrote the letter "H."

Each letter surging along those sensitive nerves, and letters slowly spelling words. She could look at the monstrous sight that he was, at that gaping wound, and ask this of him! *She* wanted him to live! So be it. He would not try to slip. The miracle man should have his chance. It was between the hammers on one side and her and the miracle man on the other.

"Wonderful! I admire your courage in saying it!" Dr. Smythe remarked thickly.

"But it will and must come true!" said Helen sturdily, as she rose to her feet and looked straight into his eyes, her own aflame with resolution. "No one must even think the contrary."

Another person had overheard the message written on Phil's arm as he looked around the corner of the screen. Lean he was and angularly built. His hair was brick-red, his face freckled, his age about thirty-five, and he had a smiling turn to the corners of his mouth. He had come down the aisle with a noiseless step, as if propelled by

inexhaustible nervous vitality, and he had the air of a man with distinctly eccentric qualities, who would never stop on a street corner to ask anybody to tell him how to do his work. No second glance would be required to see that he was American—"corn-fed and from Kansas," to use his own words.

"Well, picture girl, you seem to have put it up to me!" he said cheerily. "You've made a lot of promises in my name; but that's just the kind of talk that helps."

Bricktop examined the wound, while Helen studied his features; but she could tell nothing by them. She knew that there were cases which he refused to undertake, and nothing could change his mind. Too many "possible" cases came back from the front behind the green curtains for him to waste time on the "impossible."

"Remember he is an American!" she whispered.

"So? What part?"

"New England and the Southwest."

"That makes an all-round man. Not that gunner Sanford?"

"Yes."

"Peter Smithers—but this is a little world."

All the while his mind was on that wound: his talk an incidental byplay of his intense concentration. He began making quick, nervous little movements with his hands as if he were illustrating a

mechanical process in pantomime. When he had first appeared at the hospital this habit was considered gallery play; but most of the doctors had learned to believe in him, though some were still sceptical, as was Smythe in a measure. Here was a test. When Bricktop looked up he met professional inquiry in Smythe's eye.

"Can you?"

"Now, if I said that I could," Bricktop replied, "and I didn't, all the stick-in-the-muds would say there was one on me. I'm going to try. It's amazing how bad it is and yet what there is to work with. But there's one thing—I don't know. Never had anything like it before. I can make him as good as he was—or it's a complete failure. I want him brought over to my place immediately. And you, picture girl, you are going to stand by and write cheerful messages on his arm?"

"Yes, always!" said Helen.

"As for his ears, eyes, and vocal chords—that is up to other sharps," said Bricktop.

Phil was lifted up again and placed on something not so soft as the bed and by the motion he comprehended that he was making another journey. It was to an entrance with the sign "Oral Surgery." As Bricktop said, "This means Yours Truly!" Here he was autocrat, this stranger from Kansas by way of New York. On the door of a room fitted out with dentist's accessories and many little drawers was painted

"William Smith, D. D. S." He was always glad to tell people about himself, because, as he said, this saved them from wasting time in guessing and allowed him the start in the kind of information which was being passed around about him.

"Glad father and mother, who were sensible people, had a sense of harmony or something like that," he would say, "and didn't name me Decourcey or Charlemagne Smith. Good old name, Smith! Everybody knows how to spell it. Makes the inside of the city directory look companionable. But usually," he pointed to his hair, "I'm known as Bricktop. At school they called me Bill Bricktop; but I considered that too illiterate and undignified after I hung out my shingle. D. D. S.—I'm a dental surgeon; dental surgeon—surgeon, mind, and some other kinds of a surgeon, too. When I get time I'm going to do a book on jaws. 'Bricktop on Jaws'! Sounds like the personal memoirs of a henpecked husband, eh?"

Not only dentist, but surgeon! That was the fact that he kept beating into the British mind, which seemed to him somewhat opaque at times, when he was fighting to get the opportunity to do the work that he was now doing. He had an air of not caring for anybody, this William Smith, with his bright grey eye and smiling mouth, which frequently leads to professional success and even to average mortals being regarded as geniuses.

In New York his reputation for delicate and original work brought him many rich patients, which he never allowed to interfere with his hospital experiments on jaws. He made enough money to take care of the little Smiths as they arrived, one, two, three, four, and all red-headed.

"I should have been rather disappointed if they hadn't been," he said. "There's something in the very fact of being a red-headed Smith that ought to give any kid a start in life."

When the war broke out and he read about the havoc wrought by bursting shells he set out for Europe, believing in himself and his mission to do more good in the world repairing fractured jaws than by making up the deficiencies of nature in the mouths of the rich; but because he believed in himself that was no reason why the War Office should believe in him.

The first permission that he had secured after arriving in England was to look around the hospitals for bad cases and then to go ahead with one which everybody had given up. When he transformed an officer condemned to wear a black cloth over his face for life into a presentable human being, he had a walking testimonial of his skill which gave him an entry into the big hospital in France. What an amazing lot of things he required: laboratories and X-ray apparatus and the more the authorities gave him, the more he wanted—this William Smith, D. D. S.

When equipment was not forthcoming through the regular official channels, he went into his own pocket for the funds to buy it. His bank account depleted, he was relieved from a fit of depression by a draft from an angel in New York for twenty thousand dollars.

"Now, don't say that angels cannot draw drafts," he told Dr. Braisted, the great eye specialist from London, "or I'll think that the English have no sense of humour at all."

Braisted was as extremely British as Bricktop was American. Possibly this was why they got on so well together. Being a big man himself who had given up a practice of a hundred thousand dollars a year to save soldiers from blindness, Braisted could appreciate Bricktop's professional eagerness and altruism; and after a half-hour's talk with the American he understood that the American had a thorough groundwork of training, plus a gift. This made him one of Bricktop's early partisans. Another was Helen. There was no criticising William Smith, D. D. S. when she was about. She knew the subjects of his skill.

"You sit down and draw for them and they forget their jaws ache," he told her, as he nodded to the figures with faces and jaws swathed in bandages in the courtyard of his kingdom.

As soon as their wounds healed he had them again under the knife, for the next process in

reconstruction. Those little contrivances fashioned in his laboratory which they had to wear caused intense pain; but they bore it with noble patience. Whenever he appeared their eyes followed him with a beautiful gratitude, a childlike confidence. He was changing them from monstrosities into whole men.

"Better pay than you get filling teeth for millionaires!" said Bricktop. "Stopping teeth, I should say; that's English."

It was a familiar thing for the men in the court to see stretchers wheeled into the operating-room. After this they watched for that red-headed man with the smiling mouth to walk across from his office, as another part of the regular routine of their existence, and their sympathy went out to the fellow on the stretcher as no one else's could.

The picture girl walking beside the stretcher this afternoon did not even look up at them, let alone send them a smile as usual. When Bricktop came across from the office she was waiting at the door of the operating-room, and they noted the appeal in her eyes as she spoke to him. Very observing those maimed men who could not speak, but still had their eyesight. Whoever was on that stretcher must mean a great deal to the picture girl. Afterward, while the operation was on, she came over to them and talked, but they felt that her mind was inside the operating-room and that she was suffering. That was the thing about

her: she could feel how others suffered. It did them more good than her drawings.

After he was through with the preliminary probing and splicing and wiring, which he foresaw must be followed by many other sessions, Bricktop had what he called one of his "blow-outs."

"Fine business, war; so sensible, so logical, so considerate of everybody's feelings!" he stormed. "A man who had a robber baron for an ancestor and who likes to see his picture in the papers and wear a uniform and thinks that everything is his by divine right, when what he needs is a swift kick, wants some more glory! So he puts on his war-bonnet and starts the glorious old game, with improvements—sidewipes with jagged bits of steel that make a mess like this! Enough money fired away in one day to give everybody good teeth. Think of that—if everybody had decent teeth and well-shaped mouths! But they can't afford it. It's the killing season. The good old sport must be kept up!"

The nurses were familiar with the "blow-outs," which usually came with the reaction after a trying operation, when those skilful fingers had been so certain in their touch under an eye which was like the steel of the instruments that he used.

Phil had awakened to find that they had taken away the thing over his nose that had put him to sleep. And they had put back the sponge-like

thing in his mouth; but he could breathe better than before. Then they were taking him on another journey and propping him up in bed again, in his world of silent night. He knew, instantly her hand touched his, that it was she again. She was writing:

"It went all right. The miracle man is pleased."

"Brave little liar!" thought Bricktop, whose pessimism with the first results had made his "blow-out" particularly bitter.

"I am writing to your father for you and telling him that you will be as good as ever," she continued. "The miracle man says that the pain will be bad, and if it is too bad, clap your hands and they will stop it. But he would rather not, if you can endure it."

Phil gave her hand two pressures to signify that he understood, and had a pressure in response before she withdrew her hand with a fluttering, nervous quickness. This return pressure helped. It was like comradeship in battle. He was not making the fight alone.

Next, they were doing something to his eyes, which were finally covered with a compress. The people out in that silent blackness were divided into classes: She and they. Then they were doing something to his ears. The eye and the ear experts said the same as Bricktop. Both would try; for all three were big men, who said just what

they meant. Phil, guessing their purpose, waited for the message on his arm.

"It is all right," she wrote again. "They say you will see again and hear again as well as ever."

He believed her with the faith of those men in the court who followed Bricktop with their confident eyes. Soon the pain came; needlelike shoots of broken nerves that had been numbed by shock. A thousand needles sewing, pricking, leaping, burning, drowning the hammer-beats!

"But I'll stick it!" thought Phil.

CHAPTER XXIX

IN HER PLACE AGAIN

THE numbing horror of it—and to have come into her life—hers! Enveloping horror, the horror of war personified, drove Henriette out of the ward, on with mechanical steps toward a deserted part of the beach, where she could be alone and think before she faced Lady Truckleford's lot.

Her gospel of life had been a gospel of beauty: a delight in her own beauty as a source of power; a dislike of all things that were not comely; a choice of surroundings in the fashioning of a beautiful world, selected and detached in a charming egoism, where she was supreme. Phil had come from afar and played a knightly part; she had fitted him into that world. It was the end—the end of upward glances into his eyes; of profile turned in the certainty of holding his impelled, prolonged regard of admiration; of sauntering in woodland paths; of rhythmic swing in step across the fields; of fair afternoons with him posing and herself posing as she leisurely played with her brush—of the most delectable of all her experiences.

Those finely-chiselled features which she had painted, which had been the security of masculine strength in her fright as he carried her to the cover of the gully, their elation when she spoke of the woman who waited when the man went out to fight—and that monstrous fact against a pillow in the hospital!

War had made its test in kind. All the soft, pampered years were in reckoning for her, as the suffering years were for Helen. Her instinct was to fly to her quiet studio in Paris, as a child flies indoors to its mother from a storm dragon; but public opinion, personified to her distraction by Lady Truckleford's lot, would not permit this. Her friends knew that he was her cousin; and Lady Violet's teasing had been the reflection of general knowledge of the situation between the two. No one would more quickly appreciate than they in their own beautiful world that any conventional outcome would now be impossible, yet none readier to point the finger at heartlessness. They would expect devoted attention to him for a certain period in his ghastly misfortune.

Had she courage? Could she bear standing by his bedside and looking at his bandaged face? She must! Her part became clear. Her cousin and friend had been maimed; she pitied him; suffering should go with her grief for him in a way that would engage the sympathy of all. What

were they saying at Lady Truckleford's at this minute? Their opinion had come to mean much to her. They knew only that she had put her hands to her eyes and screamed and staggered out of doors. Was not this the natural result of such a shock? And the next? It would be to inquire about him.

Starting back to the ward, a new horror presented itself on the way. All her life she might be known as the woman who was waiting for a man, who returned to her a blind, deaf wreck. He would exist, haunting her memory, invading her beautiful world with a mauling hand. If only—she shuddered at the thought which easily became familiar in an era when the quick became the dead as a matter of course out where the guns were firing. Perhaps he was already gone. She gasped and halted as she found the possibility hastening her steps. The man for whom she had waited, though they had not really been engaged as she kept reminding herself, would have fallen in action and the slate would be clean.

She was at the door of the ward and heard her voice asking a nurse how he was.

"He's transferred to Dr. Smith. There's been an operation. I've not heard the result," replied the nurse coldly; for a woman finds it as easy to speak coldly to another woman who is beautiful as a man finds it difficult.

"And my sister?" asked Henriette.

"She went across with the stretcher."

As Henriette made a turn in the path which brought her in sight of the Oral Surgery sign, Helen was passing under it and coming toward her. She was pale and faint with exhaustion from the strain which had ended with that final tax on her strength, as she put all she had into the message of optimism which she had written on Phil's arm. So near had she been to him, so bound up with him in thought and feeling, that coming suddenly face to face with Henriette affected her strangely. She had a tightening in her throat and Henriette a stifling constraint along with her suspense. After a silence, Helen was the first to speak.

"He stood the operation well," she said.

"And he will live—live?" Henriette asked, her breath catching on the words.

Helen remembered now how her sister had put her hands over her eyes and screamed. Afterwards she had not thought of Henriette, only of him. It had been too horrible for Henriette to bear. Henriette loved him and he loved her, and her eyes to Helen's revealed her suffering in the past two hours. Now she had come back as one in a dream, afraid to ask how he was.

"Yes, he will live, Henriette—oh, how awful it has been for you! His body is as good as ever. He will live and make the fight. He has promised—such a hard fight!"

"Then he had wished to die? He was going to, you mean, and—and——" Henriette wrenched out the words.

"Yes, and the doctor says that he would have died. It is all a matter of will-power. But we told him that he would get his sight and hearing back and except for some little scars will be the same as before."

"Will he?"

"He must! We must not allow him or ourselves to think anything else. Just must—must!"

"Yes!" Henriette breathed faintly.

"Will you go in and see him?"

"I——" Henriette hesitated. "No, not to-night!" she concluded.

The two sisters walked along the path in silence, which was a gripping silence for both. When they came to the parting of the ways to their quarters, Helen took Henriette's hand in hers.

"There is another reason why he wants to live. You asked him to," she said.

"I—I could not bear it—I went out. How could I? What do you mean?"

"The will was everything in the crisis, as I said. Often such cases—well—some one had to speak to him and tell him it would all come out right when it was so hard for him to breathe, or he would not have tried to breathe any more. So I wrote on his arm and asked him to live for—for the sake of those who loved him—and he

could not see that it was I—and I signed it H!"

Henriette withdrew her hand from Helen's in a spasm which shook her frame. She opened her lips to speak, but would not trust her own tongue and whirling brain.

"Again you took my place!" she exclaimed, at last.

"It was for you—to give him hope to inspire him for the fight!" Helen replied, with passionate conviction.

"Yes—yes, I understand. I can't think! It's too horrible! Go on taking my place—you can—it's easier for you! Yes, go on! It unstrings me too much now to see him—yes, look after him, encourage him. Go on—only don't tell any one the ruse that you are playing!" she concluded, with a burst of emphatic coherency before she bolted along the path, murmuring to herself: "Yes, that is it—that is the way out!"

Over at Lady Truckleford's lot they had been thinking of little else but Henriette. How would she take it? The lot was gathered in the reception-room before going into dinner, and when Henriette entered all eyes were covertly or openly upon her. Lady Violet took the lead by springing up and kissing Henriette on the cheek.

"You poor dear!" breathed Lady Violet. "Of course we've heard, and we've all felt for you!"

Henriette, pale in her distress, had never seemed more beautiful to Capt Landor, who had had a bullet through the arm. Usually Henriette cut his meat for dinner; but to-night Lady Violet was assured of the privilege.

"I have just come from inquiring as to the result of the operation," said Henriette. "He is resting easily. As you know, he is really a distant cousin of Helen's and mine and we were all fond of one another. We had such good times together at Mervaux. It was so fine of him to stay and fight instead of going home. Then this! You can't imagine the shock of it!"

"Terrible!" gasped Lady Violet. "We all know what it means to you."

"And even more to Helen!" said Henriette. "Poor Helen! She was utterly devoted to him and he to her. She has stood by so bravely, insisting that he will get his sight and hearing back and that Bricktop will remake him as good as new. When I think of him as I last saw him and how Helen is suffering—it's too horrible!"

With a weary drooping of her lashes, she said that she was too tired to think of coming down to dinner and went to her room, where, after she had bathed her face and taken down her hair, her reflection in the mirror in its faultless outline was a reflection of something in her cosmos which could have no part with deformities of any kind, and her relief was infinite over the gate that Helen had

providentially opened. She hastened to write to her mother, the letter a symbol of cutting a chain with the past:

" . . . I saw it—a monstrous wound of the jaw. He is deaf, blind, speechless. They say that he will live. I need not tell you what a day it has been for Helen and me! When I thought of his gallant conduct at Mervaux in refusing to leave Helen there alone, of our fun over the portrait and the cartoons, and all that he meant to his father and mother, the thought of what has happened to him was too horrible for words. I am glad that when he became *épris* I did not encourage him. Now I see that his real fondness was for Helen. He asks for her, wants her near him. She is a great comfort to him and her feeling for him is deeper than either of us realised. I hope you will give up your trip to Truckleford, travelling conditions are so abominable."

To which Madame Ribot consented, as she was no longer interested in Peter Smithers's visit.

Helen, after she had separated from her sister on the path, had thought little of what had passed between them. Her mind was too intensely objective. Anything to make Phil well! It did not matter how it was done or who did it. Upon her return to her room she gathered up her drawing materials, which seemed to belong to her in some other incarnation, and put them in a drawer. It was as if her life was Phil's; his wound hers.

She wrote the promised letter to Truckleford, and then she prayed for Phil; and after she had prayed to the God above, she clenched her fists and murmured: "Will! Must!" in the face of all the hard little gods below who seem to get a good deal out of the hand of the God above.

CHAPTER XXX

PETER SMITHERS IN ACTION

TWO white heads bent over the tombstones in the cemetery at Truckleford and talked genealogy; two white heads strolled on the lawn and had tilts in theology, or sat in the library and discussed English and American viewpoints. The vicar of Truckleford believed in a State church, while Dr. Sanford held that this meant mixing religion and politics, which was a bad business. Sanford of England, who had cheeks ruddy from the moist climate, brought his sentences to a close with a rising inflection; and Sanford of New England had a dry complexion, with sharp little wrinkles around his eyes, and brought his sentences to a close with a falling inflection. They seemed a trifle strange to each other at times, though they were speaking the same language; and either would have been highly complimented if you had told him that you recognised him for the Englishman or the American he was at once? They rambled from philosophy to politics, from scientific versus classical education to the future of humanity generally, rich in words and ideas if not in money.

Then, two other white heads potted about the flower and kitchen gardens, both clicking their knitting needles industriously for soldiers the while. In England, roses were not often frost-killed or burned by the hot sun of summer, which brightened the sunflower and the goldenrod fringing the roadsides with yellow in autumn at home. Two white heads discussed the servant problem in both countries; and England thought it pretty bad at home until she heard of the state of affairs in America. It was the particular care of the two English heads, plotting together in their nightly conferences, that the American cousins should feel at home when English facility in this respect, however insular and offish the islanders may seem abroad, requires no calculation.

The visit at last come true had the aspect of romance under the circumstances. It required a certain amount of courage for Dr. and Mrs. Sanford to cross the Atlantic in the midst of submarine activity quite in keeping with ancestral Pilgrim daring in crossing in the seventeenth century.

From Jane came an occasional letter on the state of affairs in Longfield. "Things can't be right personally with you away," she wrote. "I am getting too fat and lazy for words. But things exteriorly, as Phil would say when he got hisalutin, are just the same. Garden doing fine except the cauliflowers, which look peaked; but they will pick up, Patrick says, as cauliflowers have a way

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of looking peaked and ragged before they get a start. No hyphenates and few potato bugs in Longfield this year. I put up thirty jars of currant jelly and it looks licking good. That is more than you can eat; but sure, unless you change your habits, it isn't more than you can give away. I expect you're putting your shoes outside your door every morning to be blacked, like the lords do. Well, when you come home you will find the blacking-brush in the same old place and that Jane has not changed. I am writing a letter to Phil himself. With best regards,

“Your truly, JANE.”

There was one subject which knit the cousinship of the four ever closer—Phil. The local postmaster was convinced that there was no danger of one officer starving, if soldiers could live on cake, judging by the number of packages which went through the parcels post to Second Lieutenant Philip Sanford. Their thoughts were those of hundreds of thousands of other households in England. The pride of it for the vicar and his wife was that they, too, had a son at the front. They would not waive the claim that he was partly theirs and their guests did not ask it. Every day they wrote to Phil, and his cheerful letters in answer, always making sport of the mud and minimising the dangers—long letters when the battery was in billets—brought the four

heads into communion of spirit whenever the envelopes arrived. Always there was the fear—the fear over hundreds of thousands of households, no less poignant in each because of the hundreds of thousands of others—the fear which they never mentioned and never forgot.

The postman brought Helen's letter, the only one in the post that trip, to Dr. Sanford when he was alone on the lawn, thinking that a point had occurred to him which would give him the better of the argument with the vicar the next time they resumed a certain discussion. After he had opened the envelope and read the first sentence, he folded the sheet and walked away into the garden to be undisturbed. He must think how to break the news to his wife.

"This time Cousin Phil is not writing to you himself, but I am writing for him," Helen wrote. "Though I have never seen you, it seems as if I knew you and I think, as Phil's father and mother, you are the kind who might suffer more in the end if some of the truth were held back by clever phrases than if it were all told at first. He loves you so much and you love him so much that it is the only honest way.

"He is as whole as ever in body, his mind quite clear, despite the wound in his jaw from a shell-fragment; but he must remain here at the hospital for many months, while a miracle man of a surgeon will make his jaw as good as ever. As the

result of shell-shock he is also, for the moment, both blind and deaf; but other miracle men will bring back his sight and hearing. All the great ones are prepared to spoil him with attention, he is so brave.

"As he cannot write himself, I shall write for him every day. But you must not be impatient; as these modern miracle men, unlike the Biblical ones, must take time to perform their wonders. Write him as many letters as you can and I'll spell out every word of them to him. Yes, go on writing just as if he were making a fight at the front and that will help him in the new fight he is making in the dark against pain and for you. When he returns he will be the same as when he left you, only dearer to you as you will be to him. He will recover completely. Depend on this."

"Brave little liar!" as Bricktop had said. Yet Helen believed every word.

Dr. Sanford continued to walk up and down after he had finished the letter. Mrs. Sanford, coming out of doors and seeing him, knew that something had happened to Phil, though the Doctor looked only customarily thoughtful and calm. She went toward him, followed by the vicar and his wife; they, too, divining from her attitude that tragedy had come to Truckleford.

"I am ready! What is it?" asked Mrs. Sanford.

He read the letter aloud, thinking that this would soften the message for her. She listened with a white face and still eyes. When he had finished she took his hands in hers; then in silence the two started walking up and down, arm in arm. Two other white heads in the background, quite as if it were their son, also walked up and down, arm in arm. Silent, very silent, the garden, except for the occasional hum of a bee.

The mother was looking the worst fairly in the face, with characteristic fearlessness.

"We have a little money—enough if——" If Phil should be in the eternal night they could care for him, was the first thought of her love. But after they were gone——

The other two white heads were thinking the same. Phil had done this for their cause. They had a little money; he should not want. When, finally, the first two came toward the vicar, he was suddenly mindful that Helen had written the letter; rather than Henriette—which was very odd.

"She would state all the truth, I Helen would," said the vicar. "It's her merit. She could not help doing so. When she says that Phil will be as right as ever again, you may depend upon it."

"We do!" said Phil's mother. "He will get well! He must! We'll not think anything else. He will!" There was a quiet, tense vitality in her declaration akin to Helen's own.

"He will!" said Dr. Sanford.

"That sound better," said the vicar. "It is worthier of the ancestors and Phil."

"We must go to him!" said the mother.

The next morning this pair of old children set out, holding hands in the compartment a good portion of the way to London. Cities always confused Dr. Sanford. Only the call to his son would have given him courage to enter the portals of that sombre War Office, which was only one of many doors whence he took his plea.

Every one was sorry and kindly, too, when they looked over the old clergyman and he told his tale. If they let one parent go to a great hospital in the military zone in France, then they would have to let thousands; but one official, with a sly wink, suggested that he get a note from his Ambassador. Going to the Embassy simply as an American gentleman, without any letters of introduction, he waited in the reception-room a long time till somebody returned from luncheon; and the somebody, who was a young person with a Burke's Peerage under his arm, said that it was quite out of the question for the Embassy to interest itself in his case.

"It's the rules, I suppose," said Mrs. Sanford.

"Yes. We can't go behind the rules," said the Doctor.

It was a sad journey for the old children back to Truckleford and their hand-clasp was tighter than before as they looked out at the hedges slip-

ping by. Awaiting them were letters from Helen, long letters, less matter-of-fact than the first one, with a chant of optimism running through the sentences; and a telegram from Peter Smithers, who had arrived at Liverpool and was coming to see them.

Automobiles were difficult of hire in England then; yet Peter arrived in one, a high-powered one at that. How could he travel by train when he was on the verge of poverty from keeping up that miserable little farm? The way he came through the gate heralded a dynamic advent at the vicarage.

"Glad to meet you, sir, and you, too, Mrs. Sanford!" he said. "Suppose you four have all the ancestors looked up and card-indexed by this time. And what about Phil? Still wallowing in the mud for the pleasure of being shot at? What!"

The look in all four faces drew a sharp, penetratingly anxious exclamation from him.

"Tell me!" he demanded, and the whole aspect of the man had changed in an instant. "Tell me!"

He dropped in a chair at the news; but no sooner was he down than he jumped up, jerking a cigar out of his pocket and chewing at it as he began pacing back and forth with pounding steps.

"Bricktop can do it if anybody can!" he said excitedly. "I'd back Bricktop against anybody or

anything! Bricktop over there operating on Phil! It's a small world. Bricktop will do it; and if there aren't specialists over there big enough to bring back Phil's sight and hearing, we'll get them, by George!" Peter took another turn, chewing at his cigar, and then whirled around. Decision was in his eyes and in every one of the definite wrinkles of his face. "I know what you've been thinking—if the worst should happen!"

"Yes, we had!" admitted Mrs. Sanford.

"But it won't, not to Phil! He'll pull out. George! I'd have given a thousand to have seen him knock that Prussian down! Whatever happens, I want you to know that all I have is back of him and every cent I have, if that farm doesn't break me, goes to him—and there's three millions, anyway."

Let it be recorded that the effect of this sudden declaration on four white heads was indescribable, particularly on the vicar and his wife, who had a feeling that they were witnessing some sort of a Christmas-time extravaganza. Phil's mother said that it was quite in keeping with Peter's reputation for making vital decisions promptly. At the same time she only gasped, "Peter!" while Dr. Sanford blinked like one who tries to look the sun in the face.

"Surprises you! I expect it is surprising," said Peter. "Never had any other idea since he was a

little shaver. Always had my eye on him, but wasn't going to ruin him by making him think he didn't have to go out and clean cattle cars and knock down Prussians on his own account. Wanted to leave my fortune to a man, and the way to become a man is to go out and scratch gravel. Was kind of backing him when Ledyard took him on, but don't you tell him; it would make him mad. Now Ledyard says he won't let him go; but Ledyard doesn't own the whole United States. Remember last time I saw Phil and I was talking about my employees' clubhouse—he gave me such a slam that my indignation was real."

Misfortune to Phil had cracked the Smithers burr and revealed the sweet kernel inside.

"Peter, I——"

"Peter, we——"

The Longfield Sanfords were at last trying to utter their thanks. As for the Truckleford Sanfords, they still expected to see Peter toss a rope skyward and climb up it out of sight.

"Bless you for a pair of the best old dears that ever lived!" said Peter. "If it hadn't been for your father, Doctor, I might be holding Bill Hurley's job driving the local 'bus. Now, what you want to do is to get to Phil, don't you?"

"Yes! Oh, above everything!" exclaimed Mrs. Sanford.

"I gadded all over London trying," said the Doctor, who narrated his experiences.

"That baby boy at the Embassy, with his little accent and his little moustache turned up, and afraid he might slip on his little shadow, that's Levering's son," said Peter. "Levering started driving a donkey in a mine and left about two hundred thousand dollars and got heart disease making it, while his wife was in Paris. She couldn't stay at home in Cokeville because she had no social standing there. He used to see her once a year, if he could spare two weeks to cross the pond. But I'm wasting a lot of words on him, though it's time somebody gave him a twist. Now, I'll go back to London to-night."

"But you must stay to dinner!" begged the .icar.

"Sorry. But we want to see Phil. Is there a telegraph office here? Good! Might as well start things moving. I'll get dinner at one of those little inns. First-rate meat and potatoes; that's all a man wants—only the English never season anything. Put a pile of salt on the side of their plate and dab every mouthful in it, which means irregular distribution and a waste of time."

He was shaking hands all around preparatory to going, when he had a reminder.

"I want to see that ancestor of ours," he said. "Mine by adoption! You don't mind? I see

your family isn't large and there ought to be enough of him to go round."

"We welcome you!" said the vicar, chuckling. This interest in genealogy convinced him that both Peter and the three millions must be real.

Peter looked the ancestor over with the eye of one who knows men.

"I'm proud of him!" he concluded, with a wink to the vicar. "You can see that he had his teeth set firmly in their sockets. Most ancestors have, and those of later generations get wiggly. Well, I'm off!"

When Peter had gone four white heads gazed at one another and swallowed and gazed. Three million dollars! Peter confessed it! And all for Phil!

"Hm-m—let the cat out of the bag!" he mused on his way to London. "Couldn't help it! Enjoyed it! What the professors call the psychological moment! Enjoyed keeping it secret before—enjoyed letting it go. Phil will keep that farm running after I'm gone—if it doesn't break me before I pass over the border."

Now Peter did not go to the War Office and beat a table and argue; but he set things in motion by sending cablegrams and telegrams. He did not even send up his card to the Ambassador until the Ambassador had received messages from four United States senators, from the man to whom he owed his appointment, and from the

Secretary of State, that Peter Smithers was in London. Nobody was out at luncheon when he went to the Embassy, where he was at once given a note to some one on high who would immediately communicate to some one at the War Office. But before leaving he reminded the Ambassador that one of the Embassy chore-boys, ought to be taught civility as well as manners.

Nor did Peter go to the War Office until the General who was above the General who was above the General that Phil had first seen also had heard from several quarters about the importance of Peter Smithers. The Great One at the War Office was most cordial, and Peter talked to him as if he were used to meeting Great Ones. Both were leaders and organisers of men.

"I think there will be no difficulty," said the Great One. "We'll make a special case of it on account of his having to remain a long time at a base hospital in France. I'd heard about that young man before. Fine chap! Hope he'll pull through. A relative of yours?"

"Nephew!" Peter replied truthfully.

Hadn't he formally adopted himself as Phil's uncle?

CHAPTER XXXI

A THOUGHT FOR HELEN

"**B**RICKTOP!"

"Peter!"

They took a grappling hold of each other, as if about to engage in a wrestling match to prove which was the more jubilant over this meeting; for Peter was a man after Bricktop's own heart and Bricktop after Peter's.

"You're red-headed as ever!" said Peter.

"What did you expect? That I'd dip my locks in a dye-barrel? Needed all the red I had and some more to deal with some of the stick-in-the-muds, who would not believe that I am a surgeon. Say, but you're good for sore eyes and nostalgia!"

"Think of you being over here and operating on Phil!" Peter held William Smith, D. D. S., off at arm's length in respectful admiration.

"If you hadn't sent me that twenty thousand I wouldn't have had the equipment for the job," Bricktop replied.

"You don't mean that that twenty thousand—maybe it's saved Phil!"

"Exactly what I do mean!"

"Think of that!" Peter swallowed hard and blinked. "But don't you tell him about it—not yet. Here I am talking, when there is somebody outside that——" He did not finish his sentence, but drew Bricktop out of his office into the reception-room, where Dr. and Mrs. Sanford were waiting.

"I don't need any introduction. You're his father and mother!" Bricktop exclaimed.

"Yes, we are here, thanks to Peter," said Mrs. Sanford. "He has a wonderful way of managing things."

"Peter was born to manage things!" said Bricktop. "He gave me my start."

"Just as Dr. Sanford's father gave me mine. And we are here because Phil's is a special case which cannot be moved over to England. Merely had to make the authorities see the light. But it seems to me, Bricktop, you and I are doing a lot of gassing, when what we want is to see Phil. How is he getting on?"

Peter had hesitated to put that question, thinking of what this day meant to the Sanfords. Bricktop looked into the honest, serene eyes of the old pair and seeing that they were not afraid of it, told the truth.

"In two or three days I'll come to the big test," he said. "If that operation succeeds, the rest will be easy."

Then a soft voice, which had the very melody of cheer, added:

"And it will succeed!"

Helen, coming into the room, had overheard Bricktop's opinion, and impulsively reinforced it with her faith. Dr. and Mrs. Sanford for the first time looked into the eyes of the woman who had written to them for Phil and about Phil. Their transparent depths reflected the quality which they had associated with her. Something told her that she was not plain to them, and the thought gave her a thrill of happiness.

"What beautiful eyes!" exclaimed Mrs. Sanford involuntarily. "They are like your spirit!"

"I——" Helen flushed. No one had ever said this to her except the old artist teacher. That any one should think that anything about her was beautiful!

"I'm afraid I was personal!" murmured Mrs. Sanford; and both were embarrassed.

"It was a very nice way to be personal," Helen stammered, finding her smile. "How happy he will be to see you! How he loves you!"

"And his sight and hearing and speech?" asked Mrs. Sanford.

"A long treatment, but they will come back," replied Helen.

She led the way into the ward where Phil was in a big chair, a comely figure of youth up to his chin.

The rest of him was a ball of white, with a harness of silver woven in with bandages for his lower face, and bandages over his eyes.

"Your father and mother have come," Helen wrote on his arm.

They sat down without any demonstration, one on each side of his chair, and each took one of his hands, receiving a strong answering clasp. Peter "filled up," as he put up, and went out into the court to pace up and down. When he returned they were in the same position.

This hand in his own left hand Phil knew was his father's, because it was larger and bonier than the one in his right, which was soft and yielding. He was thinking of Longfield; seeing the village street under the old elms, the garden and the porch, and the glory of sunrise and sunset in the Berkshires; relieving the joys of sight. In turn, in that silent communion, Dr. and Mrs. Sanford saw him coming up the path to the porch at all ages and on all occasions.

"That wiggle of his right foot," said Helen, "means that he wants to talk. "Oh, we've developed a remarkable code and we've not gone in for the blind raised letters because he never will need them."

She brought a pencil, which she slipped between his fingers, and a pad, which she fixed on a slanting table fastened to the chair.

"He's becoming wonderfully good at it," she

said, "though at first he was always getting off the track and writing one line over another."

Slowly but quite clearly he wrote his big letters on small pages, which Helen passed to the father and mother.

"Some family reunion, this! It is a cinch that I get well—father, pardon the language!"

This was the first sheet. The two looked at each other and smiled. "It's Phil, all right!" murmured Peter, echoing their thoughts.

"When I get my new countenance, new eyes and ears, and descend on Longfield, even Jane will admit I'm grown up. I am going to show Hanks that he is not the only one who can branch out"—this on the second sheet.

"Peter arranged it so you could come, I hear," came the third. "Tell him he has been so kind that I almost regret I did not go to work for him and ruin his business."

There was something very like a snort from the direction of Peter, who was caught grinning when the others looked around.

"Tell Bill Hurley, who is for the Allies but a pessimist about their chances, that the Allies are going to win the war. And you are coming often, aren't you? Won't they let you? This conversation is getting one-sided." He pulled up his sleeve, which was a signal to Helen.

"Yes," she wrote, at Dr. Sanford's dictation.

"Peter has got a little house for us and permission to stay near you."

"This is just simply **HAPPINESS**".—Phil spelled out the word in capitals. "Tell Peter he is certainly some arranger. Isn't he going to come and see me, too?"

Peter was swallowing hard—a habit that he had formed since he had arrived at the hospital. He advanced to Phil's side.

"Peter is here," Helen wrote.

Phil's hand went out, searching in the darkness, and Peter's leapt toward it and the two clasped in a firm, prolonged grip.

"Shall I tell him that every cent I have is his, when he expected nothing?" Peter put the question to Helen.

She knew only the vague outline of their story, yet understood the principle involved, and she hesitated. Peter studied her face with his shrewd glance.

"I guess not," he said. "He's fighting for something worth more than three millions and money won't make a fellow of Phil's calibre fight any harder. I guess it would be kind of cheap to do it now. I'll wait till he can see me, or till we know that he is not going to——"

"He will!" put in Helen sharply.

"Say," Peter said admiringly, "they ought to put you in command of an army corps out there!

You've got the kind of spirit that would break the line."

"Spirit has nothing to do with it," Helen replied. "It is simply a fact."

"I'd make it the whole army!" said Peter, who belonged to the school which believes that if you make up your mind to do a thing you will do it.

Phil was writing again, his fingers moving more rapidly than usual, his writing less distinct, as if he were under the pressure of strong emotion:

"I should have slipped if it had not been for her. It is a thing one can't talk about—the great thing of all, that makes me bear the pain and make the fight—what Henriette has done for me."

"Henriette!"

Dr. and Mrs. Sanford and Peter uttered the word together and stared involuntarily at Helen, in blank inquiry. She looked away quickly at the floor and murmured:

"Yes, Henriette!"

There was a silence then, while she took the pad and pencil from Phil and removed the little table, which provided her with the relief of movement.

"Not too much at one time, lest we tire him," she said.

She went with them through the court, where the seeing men in their pain watched them passing; and on the way her glance hovered into theirs

beseechingly and her lips were parted as if about to speak, but she could not find words until they were on the path.

"You would make me any promise, wouldn't you," she asked, "in order to save him?"

Now she told the secret which only she and Henriette knew, how she had been mistaken for her sister.

"You must not undeceive him, or think of it, or speak of it! You will promise?"

Her nostrils were quivering and her eyes had the steady light of command. As they nodded, the father and mother felt a trifle in awe of her, this woman in a warrior's mood who had been a link between them and their son. She gave them a smile of thanks; then, in the flutter of an impulse, kissed Mrs. Sanford on the cheeks and abruptly started back to the ward, where she gave Phil a hand-clasp to signal her return and two clasps to learn if he wanted anything. He asked for his pad:

"It's pretty hard on them. Did I cheer them up?"

"Yes, and they know that you are going to get well."

"Good! Aren't they dears? Shall we take a constitutional? It tired the old head-piece a little, all that excitement."

The constitucionals were promenades up and down the court, with digressions sometimes out

onto the paths when he felt particularly venturesome. Her arm through his, wheeling on him as a pivot when they came to the turns, he feeling the touch of her hand upon his wrist, she realising the helplessness of that tall form without some one to guide it, they had paced back and forth so many times now that these promenades had become a part of their existence. His silence she must share. They might think each his own thoughts in the nearness, the interdependence, of that strange companionship. Sometimes he carried on imaginary conversations with her and she with him; and the great things to both were the unspoken things, rather than those written on his arm or on the pad. When the revelation should come that she was not Henriette—but Helen never thought of that. It was the bridge on the other side of the promised land of his recovery.

She was not surprised when she saw Henriette enter the court just as they were turning toward the ward. Henriette came faithfully every day to inquire how he was and reported her visit at dinner with Lady Truckleford's lot. These were practically the only occasions when the sisters met. Henriette's manner was that of affectionate sympathy for Helen and pity for Phil.

"His father and mother have been to see him?"

"Yes. It made him very happy."

"And Peter Smithers was with them?"

"Yes."

Phil, who knew only that Helen had stopped to speak with some one, had no means of knowing who. She was the same to him as any other person of millions in his silent night, unseen, unheard. His circle of actual human beings consisted of Helen, or Henriette, as he thought, Bricktop, the nurses, the specialists, and now his parents and Peter. They were the visible stars in the darkness. And Helen was taking him back to his chair now.

"You've heard that Smithers will leave all his fortune to Cousin Phil, willy-nilly?" said Henriette, following them indoors. "Mother wrote it from Paris. She had it from Truckleford."

"Only they have not told him," Helen said.

"Why not? I should think that if there were anything that would make him want to live it would be the thought that he was to have three millions."

"Mr. Smithers decided not," Helen replied.

"And how has he stood the day?" Henriette asked the stereotyped question of her sister.

"Very well!" was the answer. "I'm afraid it may have tired and excited him, though." She was careful not to let him overtax himself; and now, when he wanted his bed, she added: "I must not let him write much."

If Henriette prolonged her visits it was when

Helen was writing him messages or he was writing to her. The process seemed to fascinate her.

"There is a question I want to ask," Phil wrote. "I have wondered about it a good deal. Helen never sends me any messages. She has not even shaken my hand and said hello to her seventeenth cousin. I can't see her new cartoons, but I remember all of her old ones. Tell me!"

Henriette had been looking over his shoulder as he wrote, Helen standing to one side till he had finished the first sheet. A number of times before he had asked where Helen was, and after a strange thrill that dried her throat she had replied:

"Drawing and in her ward. She inquires about you every day."

It was Henriette who reached for the first sheet this time. When he had finished the second sheet she passed both to Helen, with a studious inquiry on her face and without speaking. Then she looked around the room. It was empty, save for one form asleep on a cot in the far corner. Helen did not look up. She was motionless, staring at the sheets. He was hurt because she had never shaken his hand—she who had no thought except him! And, yes, he had thought of her for herself a little—a part of his kindness even when he was racked with pain. She folded the

sheets gently, but without the stir of so much as an eyelash, when Henriette's voice brought her out of her daze.

"The hoax seems complete," said Henriette. "He is wholly convinced that you are I."

"Yes," said Helen. "You wished it, didn't you, and it has helped him—yes, he has said that it kept him alive!"

"Kept him alive!" repeated Henriette, in a monotone.

"Yes, you, not I, kept him alive!"

When people knew this! Henriette was thinking of the Lady Truckleford lot. There were pitfalls ahead which she had not foreseen.

"Why didn't you undeceive him?" she demanded.

"I—I could not. It meant so much to him. As soon as he is well then I shall tell him."

"And if he never gets well——"

"He will!" Helen insisted. "But taking the view that he will not," she added, "only his father and mother know and Peter Smithers. They found it out inadvertently and have sworn to keep the secret." Henriette half closed her eyes thoughtfully as the two sisters looked at each other.

"It seems safe," breathed Henriette, raising her lashes and smiling in relief.

Phil was writing again:

"You do not answer. Helen wrote only one

letter to me while I was at the front. I fear that I have offended her. Won't you tell me?"

"I—I must explain in some way!" said Helen.

"Let me!" Henriette interposed. "I've never tried writing on his arm, but I think that I know how from watching you."

She rolled up his sleeve and taking his hand to hold up the arm, as she had seen Helen do, traced the letters, slowly announcing each word as she wrote it:

"This is Helen. She has just come to see you and has come often and thinks that you are making the bravest kind of a fight."

He caught her hand in both of his and shook it warmly in his happiness.

"You don't write as well as Henriette," he wrote in reply, "but I have a lot of experience and could read it. What are you drawing? What cartoons are you making? What mischief are you up to generally?"

"I will tell you when I can write better. Now I shall be going so as not to tire you. Good-night!"

She gave his hand another clasp and turned to Helen, smiling, as she said: "I'm in your place, now, as well as you being in mine!" not forgetting to press her lips to Helen's before withdrawing.

She had gone through it all with a graceful facility and self-command, while Helen had found herself unable even to murmur "Good-night."

For an instant, again alone with Phil, she felt that she also was groping in a noiseless and sightless world and that she, too, was maimed. Henriette was beautiful—oh, very beautiful! It was no wonder that men fell in love with her. Just to look at her must make any man want to live. Only to the blind could she herself be beautiful. If his sight should come back, it would be the end of the walks in the court and the writing of messages for him. There was dreadful mockery in the thought when he became well he might think that she who had shared his pain in the dark night cared more for making cartoons than for him. For an instant revolt flamed up in her mind; but only for an instant. It was smothered by the appeal of his helplessness as she looked around at him.

Now he began writing again, and her thoughts were bound up in his finger-ends, in the glow of the comradeship which was sufficient unto itself from day to day. She had learned to tell his mood and if the pain were particularly bad by the way he wrote. The letters were coming slowly, ponderingly, from his pencil-point. Something puzzled him. She looked over his shoulder just as his first sentence was finished.

"Her message did not sound like Helen," he had written.

Every nerve taut with suspense, she waited with quick breaths for what was to follow.

"There was a certain style about everything that she did and said. I think that I could tell her hand from yours since I have become so sensitive to touch; though I suppose that with all the pain and the blindness I imagine all sorts of things which are not real."

A leaping something within her that was for the moment irresistible, quick desire shining in her eyes, made her stretch out her hands toward him. Then her heart seemed to stop beating and she checked herself in the reaction of one who finds herself on the verge of treason. What might have been the effect on him if she told him the truth! All her work might have been undone. She gathered her wits, mastered her emotion, and lashed them together with her will.

"It's time for you to close the writing and thinking shop for the day," she wrote on his arm; but when she started to take his pencil and pad he clung to them. He had something more which he must say, and it was best to yield to his wish, as she had learned.

"The shutters of darkness are always down on that shop," he wrote, "but there is always a light within—you!"

A glow came into her cheeks at the compliment. The light was the face of Henriette, her charm and grace, and the labour of Helen. It proved the wickedness of the impulse to tell him the

truth. How dependent he was upon Henriette in his fight!

"Now, that writing and thinking shop idea was like Helen," he was thinking—and thinking was much faster than writing and gave lazy minds more freedom to wander. "Isn't it odd? No, it's because I can't hear or speak or see—and I am tired."

"Good-night!" said her hand-clasp out there in the darkness, but bringing her very near him.

"Good-night!" his return clasp signalled back. Soon he was dozing. The pain was not sharp just then. He was nearly healed enough for another operation.

"He ought to sleep well," Helen said to the night nurse as she went out, with a peculiar relief in going, such as she had never felt before.

When she reached her room, for the first time since she had put them away the night after the ambulance brought Phil to the hospital she took her drawing materials out of her trunk, in answer to some tangent demand of the distraction that possessed her, only to put them back in and the unanswered demands of editors with them, as if she had no concern with them now. There was nothing to do but to keep on marching and fighting, without bothering what bridges were to be crossed on the other side of the promised land of his recovery.

Phil had no idea how long he had dozed when

the head pain devil, who sat on the point of his jaw directing the operations of all the little devils on the lines of communication, prodded him awake. For him the little pain devils were articulate. He lived in a world of imagined voices.

"What if you should never get well? What if we should keep you always?" said the Fiend General Commanding. "We are a trifle weak now, but you wait till after the next operation. Then we shall have a rare old dance of it. What if it should be just one operation and another and another forever? Let your wounds heal and get back your strength, only for another bout! What if you should never see green fields or hear the birds sing again?"

On such occasions there must be prompt "counter battery work," as they say at the front, or he would go out of his head. His answer was to call upon his memory for the ammunition of battle; to relieve happy incidents of the past. His father and mother and Peter Smithers and all his friends must help him.

His thoughts ran in leaping waves of half-consciousness from one picture of recollection to another . . . Yes, it was Helen who had been to see him last . . . What a ninny she had made him appear when he proposed to her by mistake under the tree! . . . How the mischief would leap out of her eyes! . . . How many kinds of Helen were there? Sometimes he had thought that she

suffered because she was plain. No, all she cared for was to make drawings. How would she and Peter get along? They would be a pair! She would be certain to cartoon him . . . The terrace at Mervaux! That last night when the three had walked up and down together in the dusk. White slippers moving in unison with his own steps—odd that he should remember that! Two voices were so alike that either girl might have been speaking. Why, it was quite the same as if he had his hearing back and could not see . . .

Henriette smiling from her easel at him—how good she was to look at! Helen with her quips as she was drawing the cartoons! Helen in her intensity as she made the real drawing! Henriette silent, smiling, her lips parted as if she were speaking and Helen's words seeming to be here! Oh, afternoon of afternoons! Air sweet to the nostrils and genial sunlight! All the senses in tranquil enjoyment! . . .

And Henriette! Oh, he had been hard hit that day. It was enough for any woman to be as beautiful as she was! But how little he realised her worth then! Her beauty had dimmed her other qualities. She was all of Helen and Henriette, too . . . That glorious courage of Henriette in face of the shells! The woman who had waited had not been afraid. When she had only to raise her finger to bring the strong and the well to pay her court, her loyalty had not faltered

when he was too horrible to remain alive. If he had not been wounded he would never have known her true worth . . .

How had such luck come to him? Silence, you pain devils! It had—it had! The messages of her sturdy determination that had fortified him and of the nonsense that cheers which she had written on his arm were recalled. Now he was imagining the touch of her fingers on his arm writing good news. Any minute he might feel her hand-clasp announcing her return. For he had no idea of time; her comings and goings set his calendar. This Henriette made the other seem only a doll. She said that he would get well. He should. It was too good a world for his sight not to come back in order that he might feed it on the beautiful vision of her—now that suffering had taught him how to appreciate her.

"You are very eerie this afternoon," whispered the Fiend General Commanding, beaten down to a grumbling complaint. "If we could only stop you from thinking of her we'd soon have you."

"You never will!" Phil replied. "She has the measure of such imps of hell as you."

And he slept.

CHAPTER XXXII

LIGHT

EITHER Helen or Phil had given the eye expert the name of Mr. Eyes and the ear expert that of Mr. Ears, which these great men who had honourific alphabetical court trains to their names did not mind. As guardian of the nerve which enables us to know whether the tenor is in good voice or not and to tell the notes of the lark from those of the nightingale or, what was more important in the latest European operations, the cough of the *soixante-quinze* from the rattle of a machine-gun, Mr. Ears was champion of silence in the hospital, which might have been as noisy as a boiler factory without disturbing Phil.

The ambulances ran softly up to the door; the nurses spoke low; they did not rattle the dishes when they brought food from the diet kitchens. After Phil's nurse had placed his tray in front of him preparatory to feeding him, she was called to the other end of the room for something, when she heard a crash behind her. She turned to see broken glass and crockery scattered on the floor. Extraordinary! This had never happened before to him. As she bent over to wipe up the small

delta of milk she saw Phil's foot wiggling energetically, demanding his pad—a rare request unless he knew that Helen was present.

“Did it make a noise?” he asked.

“Of course, and an awful mess!” she replied.

“How did it happen?”

“Experiment!” he wrote.

Experiment? It was a plain case of being out of his head. She hoped that Helen would come soon, as she always brought him around if he gave signs of delirium. Meanwhile, she must be on the watch lest he tear off his bandages, as other of Bricktop's patients had done, but her apprehensions were quite groundless.

The downfall of the tray was a test after vague intimations that sound was entering Phil's silent world. It was as loud to his ears as the crackling of a sheet of newspaper. His elation over the discovery was so great that he had a reaction when the nerve-devils began plying him with their scepticism.

“Well-known psychological illusion!” they said, using professional language which they had picked up from long association with hospitals. “Imagination played you a trick. You knew it was going to crash!”

Very likely they were right. Hadn't he imagined that he could see the interior of the ward and how Henriette looked when she bent over him to write on his arm? Hadn't he some-

times heard her steps in imagination around his chair? He set all his mind into his ears, straining for some other sound. There was none.

"This torture is called hope unfilled!" chirruped the nerve-devils. "Oh, what a dance we shall give you to-morrow after the operation! The operation is to-morrow, isn't it?"

(Of course the nurse related the whole affair to Helen when she arrived.

"'Experiment,' he said. How extraordinary!" exclaimed the nurse, who was still more astounded when Helen gave an outcry of joy and, leaning over, puckered her lips and uttered a sharp whistle—which was one of her accomplishments—in Phil's ear.

Here was real test! No imagination about this, if he had heard. She drew back, quivering with suspense. Phil was wiggling his foot almost violently for his pad and pencil.

"Did somebody whistle in my ear?" he asked.

"I did! I did!" she repeated wildly, as she wrote her reply.

"They said it was imagination"—she knew who "they" were, those "Boches" of nerve-devils.

"Score one for the Allies!" she wrote on his arm. "I'm off to tell Mr. Ears!"

The Great Man came swinging along the gravel path, half running to keep up with Helen. After the scientific test which he promptly applied he

felt as triumphant as a brigadier who had taken the first line trenches on a front of a thousand yards in the Ypres salient.

"Only a question of time, he says," Helen wrote.

"Hurrah!" Phil replied. "If anybody has a steam siren handy and blew it in my ear it would be all the more comforting."

"Soon I shall not have to write on your arm any more," she told him.

"That will be odd."

"Yes, very!" she said.

Mr. Ears had gone to tell Bricktop, who said that it would hearten Phil for the operation the next day and then despatched a messenger to the parents and Peter Smithers. The news travelled fast about the hospital. It was across the street with the Trucklefords in half an hour.

"Clever of him, wasn't it, dropping the tray?" said Lady Violet. "And so American!"

Of course the Truckleford lot had met Peter Smithers by this time. He and the Sanfords had even had tea over there on the primary invitation of Henriette, renewed unanimously by all present. He was a card, this dry American worth three millions, which were to go to that poor fellow struggling to become a whole human being again without yet knowing that he was to be the heir. Phil's case took on fresh interest. So he could hear a little! And the big operation was to-

morrow! If that should succeed and he should recover his sight!

Dr. and Mrs. Sanford sat on one of the benches in the court, at times furtively clasping hands as they thought of what was going on in the operating-room. Peter Smithers and Helen were walking up and down; and they, too, were silent. All felt their helplessness. Everything was with the skill of that red-headed dental surgeon. The eyes of the men in pain lying on the grass or resting on other benches were bright with sympathy, peering out from the white balls of bandages. Phil's was the worst case ever admitted, and theirs had been bad enough. The magician they knew had only made the attempt for the sake of those two old people sitting as quiet as if they were of stone.

Surprise appeared in the faces of the Sanfords, Peter, and Helen as Henriette came under the Oral Surgery sign. She met their glances with one of appealing inquiry, as she stood hesitant, looking from one to another. It occurred to Dr. and Mrs. Sanford how beautiful she was, and again for the thousandth time to Helen. The father and mother could not help thinking of the thing that they had promised to keep out of mind, as they saw the contrast between the two, with the well-moulded features of Henriette and the irregular ones of Helen in repose.

"Nothing yet!" said Peter. "We wait."

There was a glint of passing sharpness in his shrewd eye. She smiled in the face of it as one will who asks not to be misunderstood; then joined him and Helen in their pacing.

"You have been so wonderful to Cousin Phil," she said to Peter.

"Bricktop will do it!" remarked Peter, closing his fist and giving it a little shake. "Wonderful, did you say? Me?"

"Yes," she smiled up at him. "I did not know that there could be such men as you in the world."

"Lots of them in America!" replied Peter. "Growing them is one of our national industries! Competition is hard and they knock one another about so much some of 'em get calloused, I suppose."

"How worthy Phil is of all your generosity we found at Mervaux," Henriette continued.

"Yes. He's in there!" Peter concluded, nodding toward the operating-room.

"Yes!" she murmured. "It's too awful!"

She, too, was silent, taking her cue from his evident desire. As she paced beside him she had an atmospheric feeling of the power of the man as something absolute and indomitable, centred on fighting with his will for a decision in favour of Phil. He made talk of any kind seem petty.

When the door of the operating-room opened they heard its swing, noiseless as were its hinges.

Dr. and Mrs. Sanford rose mechanically in answer to that signal; the others turned in their tracks. As Bricktop appeared in the doorway two pairs of old eyes saw him indistinctly through a swimming haze. They were going to learn now if Phil would ever be to their sight as he was before, or—— Bricktop's round face drawn with effort lighted with a smile, as he held up his hand.

"You've done it! By God, you've done it, Bricktop!" Peter cried, rushing toward him.

"Right!" said Bricktop. "Unless there is some setback in the next two or three days. I don't think there will be. Expect to make him as good as new, only a few little scars!"

Two pairs of old eyes still saw that red head like a sun through a fog, but they had heard his words. They did not cry out; their only demonstration was to clasp hands. Helen could not speak, only look at Bricktop with glorious wonder in her eyes, which he was quick to see.

"We beat the Boches to it, eh?" he said to her.

Peter, too, had become silent in his inexpressible happiness, after he had wrung Bricktop's hand.

"If now he should recover his sight!" Henriette exclaimed abstractedly, her words apparently the beginning of a train of thought too rapid to be expressed in speech.

"He will!" said Helen and Peter together.

Phil was being wheeled from the operating-room back to the ward. Bricktop beckoned the

waiting group to come in; then bade them pause at the door until Phil was transferred from his carriage to the bed. The nurse said that he had recovered consciousness, though there was no sign of it in his motionless form.

"You tell him!" said Bricktop to Helen.

"Bricktop has done it! You win!" she wrote on his arm.

Many days awaited him, with the pain devils in their last big dance, but with every day meaning less torture. His hearing had become distinct enough to perceive an ordinary conversation around his chair as a faint hum. The silver harness still clinched his jaw and the bandages were still over his eyes.

"Quite as he was before—only a few scars," Bricktop, whom Henriette had met coming out of his office, said in answer to her inquiry when she was on her way to Phil.

Mr. Eyes happened to be coming along the path at the time. Henriette joined him and together they crossed the court.

"What hope?" she asked. She put the question to him with increased fervour every time that she saw him; and of late she had chanced to see him frequently.

"I am going to change the bandages," he replied.

Sometimes the great man had doubts about the system of bandages, which nine out of ten specialists would not have favoured, perhaps; but when he considered an operation he fell back on them as the only way. Shell-shock was baffling, freakish, in its results, and the truth was that he was groping in professional darkness to save Phil from eternal darkness. Yesterday he had strengthened the application. A matter of daily routine the change of the bandages. It brought him every afternoon to the ward and always Helen was there to receive him, the same look of confident anticipation in her eyes, as yet unfulfilled.

He pressed his hand on Phil's forehead, and this Phil had long ago come to recognise as Mr. Eyes' private signal which preceded the removal of the bandages. He was particularly welcome to-day, as Phil had had a kind of restless sensation back of his eyeballs. As the medicated pad was withdrawn, a gurgling outcry rose from his throat and he leaned convulsively forward, fingers outstretched, opening and closing as if he were trying to grasp at a reality that might escape.

"It's not true! Imagination again!" snarled the pain devils; but they could not deceive him about this.

Light had come into his black night, soft, dreamy, vague, amazing light—just light, light, light! There were no people in it, no houses, no

trees, only light which seemed like silver gauze hung before his eyes and yet to stretch to the ends of the world. It had brought something dead to life as by miracle, with a touch as soft as eider-down, sending little thrills knitting in and out all through him. Light for the first time since he had heard that hurtling scream of the shell! Light was in his brain, his veins, his tissue, singing and frolicking as it opened the doors of dark places. He wanted to embrace it, fondle it, run it through his fingers with a miser's greed of gold and gather a store of it while he might. Out of the light, as if traced by the hand of light, a message was being traced on his arm.

"What is it, Phil?" Helen asked him.

He would not attempt to speak again. He had forgotten himself when he made that gurgling outcry. It was one of the idiosyncrasies of his sick man's pride that he would not try to talk before the one who wrote on his arm. The sounds that he emitted through the bandages and silver harness must be like a stuttering idiot's lisp, as he expressed it, and he thought of himself as repulsive enough to her brave eyes without that. Speech would return normally, the throat expert had said, when the removal of Bricktop's apparatus should give it a chance.

"Light!" he wrote. "Just light, without seeing you or where I am. It seems as if I were hung up in the ether, without seeing sky or earth

and light held me up and I ate it and drank it and breathed it. Oh, it is good, good!"

"Yes, good!" repeated phlegmatic, kindly Mr. Eyes, who had brought light to many people for large fees from the rich and for nothing for those who live in the alleys. Light was his business. Yet he, too, must find some outlet for his emotion, which was to pat Helen on the head. General Ears had taken only a thousand yards, while General Eyes felt as triumphant as if he had taken five miles of first line trench, ten thousand prisoners and a hundred guns. It was the knockout blow for the little pain devils.

When he had made some experiments and put on fresh compresses and was about to go, he said, choosing his words carefully:

"I think that I may safely say, barring unforeseen complications, that he will entirely recover his sight with time. How about that?" he added, to Helen.

Her eyes were moist with happiness. She was incapable of speaking. Her first coherent thought was that Phil himself did not yet know.

"Victory!" she wrote on his arm. "You will completely recover your sight, on the high authority of Mr. Eyes himself."

For a space he made no movement. His consciousness was absorbing a transcendent fact. Helen sat beside him, waiting. Henriette, who had remained all the while in the background,

silent except for a prolonged cry of delight, came nearer and stood on the other side of him, also waiting. At length he wrote:

"Soon I shall see you!"

"Yes," Helen replied.

"And father and mother, too. Tell them quick—and Peter and Bricktop and Helen—everybody!"

"Yes. I will go instantly."

She should have thought of this before, she said to herself, as she hurried away on her mission.

Henriette was left alone with Phil. She regarded him with lashes half-closed and with her lips set in a way much like Madame Ribot's. As she grew older she would more and more resemble her mother. A step and another, slowly, gracefully, as she bent her lithe figure, her eyes opening now in venturesome inquiry as she took the place which Helen had just vacated. She had written on his arm a good deal of late and, fascinated by the accomplishment, had even practised on her own arm in her room. Phil received the hand-clasp which signalled Helen's return.

"A messenger has gone," she wrote. "Wouldn't you like to take a walk in the court?"

"Yes," was the answer. "It will make the happiness still more real to feel my legs under me."

She directed his steps as Helen had directed

them many times. The men of pain lounging in the court looking out through the holes in balls of white, watched two figures pacing in rhythmic step which was familiar when their backs were turned; but when facing them, the girl who was like a picture was in place of the picture girl. They wondered about it; wonder was a habit of their tired minds. She was beautiful, surpassingly so, soothing to the eyes, and she played Helen's part, too, by smiling at them as she passed. Her smile was more radiant than Helen's. It was a better short-acquaintance smile, one of them thought, while Helen's sent a warming, lasting glow all through you and was better for easing pain. Of the two, they would rather have Helen about every day. The men of pain were not articulate, but little that passed in the court escaped their eyes. If a sparrow lighted on a roof or a nurse appeared at a window, they knew it.

Then, just as Phil and Henriette had made a turn with their backs to them, they saw Helen appear under the sign and something happened that puzzled pain-weary heads. At the very point where the court was in view the picture girl stopped short at the sight of the two who were promenading. For an instant she was perfectly still, only an instant, as she looked at the backs of Phil and the girl who was like a picture. Then she put her hand up to her head abruptly, as one

will who recollects something, and turned away before the two had wheeled to walk back toward the Oral Surgery sign.

It was a pantomime that set the men into a prolonged quandary. Some had an idea, from the way that Helen put her hand up to her head, that there had been a flash of pain as sharp as any they had ever known through it; others thought that she was relieved to find another in her place. Perhaps both were right, and all kept thinking of it after Phil and Henriette had gone indoors.

When she had led him to his chair and drawn the coverlet over his legs as she had seen Helen do, she gave him the hand-clasp which meant "good-night." In answer, he gripped her hand tightly and drew her toward him. The other hand moved slowly back and forth in the air till its fingers touched her hair. Then, with the feathery touch of the blind, he traced the line of her forehead. A frown like her mother's gathered as he went on to her eyes, her nose, her lips, and her chin.

"It is the first time that you ever did that," she wrote on his arm.

When she brought his pad and he began writing, her head was bent, lips tight, eyes squinting with intensity, as she watched the tracing of each word.

"Yes. I often wanted to——" Her frown

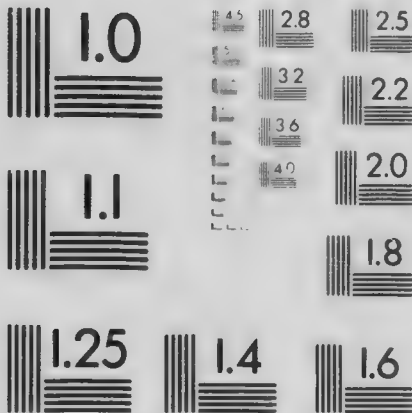
had gone. Her head rose as she drew a deep breath and smiled as she would at herself in the mirror. His pencil hesitated, then went on. "——but thought that you might think I was rude. You don't think so, now?"

"No. You did it beautifully, wonderfully," she replied. "It was the next best thing to knowing that you could really see me. And soon you shall."



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CHAPTER XXXIII

SPINNING WEBS

WAR, which shakes human beings of all sorts and conditions together as dice in a box, had placed Peter Smithers and Madame Ribot side by side flying over a main highway of France in the automobile which, with his gift for managing things, he had at his disposal. Her own gift for managing things had secured a vehicle of transit from Paris on a visit to Henriette all to her taste, with companionship all to her purpose.

She was gowned with the simplicity which the war mode required, but most effectively. During the last week her mirror signs had been most favourable, while return to action after many years of retirement had quickened her wits and brightened her smile. Thanks to the way that she had kept her hand in with General Rousseau, Count de la Grange and others, the technique of her art had not deteriorated and she was practising on Peter with a finesse of adaptability to the subject of Henriette's tailor. It was an axiom of the circle in which she had been trained that no one was more susceptible to old world

charm of her kind than self-made American millionaires.

"A good-looking woman," thought Peter, "and lots of style."

He was delighted to be better acquainted with her, as he must become in that five hours' ride. The car was a limousine, the cushions soft, the autumn day fair, and Madame Ribot was spinning webs as the rubber tires spun over the road.

"America must be wonderful," she said.

"It's a growing country," Peter replied. "Always growing out of its clothes and too many political tailors down in Washington changing the styles. But it's my country, all right, and we haven't got any Kaisers with their war bonnets on romping around over there."

"And such bold, creative, organising men"—she liked the adjectives and gave them a purring sound—"as you have made America."

"Well, America was there first, but we've certainly stuck a few skyscrapers about on the redskins' hunting preserves."

She smiled as Peter glanced around and the nature of his smile in return was the authority for a confidential tap-tap of the sole of her shoe on the hassock under her foot. Convenient hassock! Powerful, speedy car! Three millions!

"In England, where they recognise men of worth, they would have made you a peer," she remarked, with a sigh. She was putting it on

thick, but was convinced that Peter liked it that way. For that matter, Count de la Grange liked it thick, too; and men were much alike.

"Do you think so?" he asked thoughtfully.

"I am certain of it."

"And then they would call me 'My Lord'?" he continued after a pause, almost coyly.

"Yes."

Peter smiled again to himself and at the back of the chauffeur's head.

"Such leaders as you in America do not make their money for sordid purposes. It means power," she went on.

"Perhaps," replied Peter, who remained thoughtful. "You have a way of putting things, Madame Ribot," he added, with another smile.

"You build in the joy of building; and with you, I should think that it was the joy of giving, too. It was easy to see when he was at Mervaux how devoted Phil was to you. He was always speaking of you."

"Was he?" Peter inquired eagerly. "Was he?" he repeated, with a touch of surprise in his tone.

"But it was admiration for you as a man, while it was clear that he meant to make his own way. How fond I became of him! How chivalrous he was to Henriette! How brave he had been! And now they say he will quite recover. I hope so, for his sake."

"He will!" replied Peter.

Tap-tap on the hassock! Soft, inaudible tap-tap!

"It's like some fairy tale, his story, isn't it?" she murmured; "his and yours. I can understand your happiness in seeing him make good, as you say in America, where you are giving the sturdy English language something of French piquancy, and your happiness in having him for your heir. It was as if you had found a son."

"He has not been told yet," Peter said quickly. The shoe pressed down nervously on the hassock in the interval before Peter, as he looked around at her again, added, almost sharply: "I am going to tell him myself when the time comes."

"And without his expecting it—that all is going to him?" she asked, quite casually.

"Yes. I've given my word," Peter replied. "All to be his to do with as he pleases when I'm gone—all except,—you see," again he looked around and Madame Ribot's lashes flickered, so steady was his glance, "you see, I believe in men or I don't. I back them or I don't, and I'm backing Phil, his character, his judgment—all except——" he paused, still looking at her. It was not caressing time for the hassock. "All except some bequests of a few hundred thousand. And I guess," drily, "that Phil won't mind. He might waste it himself keeping up that farm if I don't waste it for him first."

He chuckled as he thought of the farm. Tap-tap went the shoe on the hassock in a riot of reassurance.

"How I should like to see your farm!" she murmured.

"Perhaps you will. I'd like to show you around," said Peter.

"Delightful! Henriette feels that she already knows it and Longfield." Longfield was near Lenox and there were delightful people at Lenox. In case that she and Henriette went to the Berkshires they might not find it altogether a bore.

"The American in Henriette's blood is coming out," remarked Peter. "She resembles you very much; only," Peter smiled a little embarrassedly, "you seem too young to be her mother."

"Do I? I——" Madame Ribot flushed and looked down. Possibly it is not the male sex alone that likes it thick.

"Yes. I could hardly believe it at first," he added, with simple candour.

Tap-tap on the hassock, oh, most softly and confidentially! Would he make Phil an allowance? No doubt take him into partnership! And Phil would doubtless prefer to live mostly abroad—but not too fast!

"France is beautiful, isn't it?" mused Madame Ribot.

"Well, the people made it that way," he answered. "For sheer beauty as it was in the

days of the fellows who got their meal tickets with bows and arrows you can't beat the Berkshires or the Blue Ridge. Yes, it's work, and these French have been at it a long time. They like to see things growing and so do I. Want everybody and everything busy and smiling, including the land. That's pretty good gospel."

"And we who live in Europe enjoy all the beauty which countless generations have made."

"Yes, like Phil will my farm," Peter replied.

"But where I get even is in making the farm. Nearly ruined me, that farm!"

"You express everything so well!" exclaimed Madame Ribot admiringly.

"Do I?" Peter said, almost naïvely. "Well, you know that depends upon whom you are talking to," he added, in another burst of simple candour.

Madame Ribot's eyelashes flickered and tap-tap on the hassock! His compliments were different from the Count's, but none the less diverting. They flattered her with a sense of personal power in tune with the luxurious humming of the motor.

"It's been a most enjoyable journey," he remarked gallantly, as he assisted her to alight at Lady Truckleford's; while he thought: "Five hours of that was enough, and I think I gave her as good as she sent!"

"Henriette is absent for the moment," said

Lady Truckleford to Madame Ribot. "She has gone to bring her Cousin Phil for tea."

The bandages off for another examination by Dr. Braisted, the autumn sunlight which kissed the tree-tops and cathedral spires and gave the Channel, which was calm that day, a gossamery sheen, was soft to Phil's irises in its caressing promise that next time the bandages were removed he should see even better.

People were now dim moving shadows to him; the windows of the ward bright squares in faintly perceptible walls. His hearing was good enough to differentiate in tones but not to make out words unless they were shouted. His pride still refused to let him speak and kept him not unhappily to his pad; for he had been so long without speech that his pencil was an old comrade to whom he disliked in a way to say good-bye. The pain devils' power had become so ineffectual that they were disregarded, pin-pricking grumblers at convalescence.

This afternoon both Henriette and Helen were present when the bandages were removed. He could see their figures dimly as two persons in a mist and hear their voices. He could tell the day nurse from the night nurse when either was speaking. But the voices of the two cousins were the same. He knew if either were at his side without discerning which; and marooned in his

own world he often thought of this. He thought of many things, sometimes lazily, again acutely.

"Better, still better!" some one wrote on his arm after Dr. Braisted had gone.

"This is Henriette, isn't it?" he wrote, as it was. She wrote most of the messages these days.

"I'll sign my name after this," she wrote in reply, "so you will know. Helen is going, now."

"No cartoons to-day?" he asked.

"Not to-day," Helen herself wrote. "You have nearly won your brave fight," she added, using the phrase that Henriette had several times used.

"Yes. Good-bye, for the present."

She gave his hand the shake that was the signal of parting, and she was glad to go, glad to be on the move in the restlessness of the last few days which seemed to urge only flight. Feeling his hand close tightly she trembled under its grasp, but could not resist as he drew her nearer. His fingers groped about till they rested on her hair. Now he traced her features with the same feathery touch of the blind as he had Henriette's, down the smooth, high brow, past the long eye-lashes and over the lump of nose, to the lips, which she pressed tight to keep them from quivering.

"I wanted to see if it were really you, Helen," he wrote. "Forgive me such bad manners!"

"Yes, it is I," she answered aloud, as she released his hand; and though she came to her feet

convulsively she appeared quite steady as she said to Henriette:

"Any day when the bandages are off he may see so well that he can tell one person from another."

There was a brittle silence, with Henriette motionless and looking past her sister at a fixed point.

"It's done! It has all come out right," continued Helen, her fingers driven into her palms and a triumphant sort of stoicism in her tone. Still Henriette looked past her and said nothing. "I——" There she stopped herself. "I must be going," she added, the words coming in a burst as she went toward the one thing distinct to her eyes, the stream of light from the open door, with the precipitancy of one who has been giddily crossing a narrow bridge and hastens the last steps as loss of equilibrium threatens.

"Any day he may see so well that he can tell one person from another!" Henriette repeated. "Well," with a shrug after a pause. Then she smiled as she would into her mirror as she wrote on Phil's arm:

"Shall we walk over to Lady Truckleford's for tea?"

"Yes," he replied.

He had been there twice already. It was the longest journey he had made on foot since he had been wounded; a welcome change of routine; a

bold undertaking. Dr. and Mrs. Sanford, who were coming to see him, met the two as they were crossing the court. Henriette greeted them with her winning smile and insisted that they, too, must come to the Trucklefords'. The gravelled path was too narrow for the four to walk abreast and the father and mother fell in behind the erect figure of their son, arm in arm with Henriette.

"She is very beautiful!" whispered Mrs. Sanford to her husband.

"Yes."

Their looks met and held, but they said nothing. Phil's wish was theirs and they had made a promise. At the crossing of the road they met Peter, who could not wait for Phil to come to the Trucklefords', but must go to him; and Henriette stopped to tell him how much better Phil's eyes were and to learn about her mother's journey from Paris. Every word reflected her radiant delight at seeing him again. Then he dropped to the rear to talk with the Sanfords, who glanced at the two ahead and then at him significantly.

"Resembles her mother," said Peter. "Inherited her good looks."

"We shall see her, too?" said Mrs. Sanford, as if awed at the thought.

"Yes. All we need for a family reunion is the old pair at Truckleford."

"And Helen!" put in Mrs. Sanford.

"And Helen!" said Peter absently. He was

not in talking mood. He did not utter a syllable, but chewed at his under lip till they were in the grounds of the old chateau which had been transformed into a hospital. "I'm backing Phil!" he muttered stubbornly to himself, then.

Madame Ribot hurried forward to embrace Henriette, while Lady Truckleford made sure that the shy old clergyman and his wife felt at home. Although her ideas might be vague about the nature of the charities which she patronised, she was a genuine and discerning hostess.

"It's clear who is the hero here," she said, nodding toward the group forming around Phil. Madame Ribot was most demonstrative of all over him. She insisted herself upon writing on his arm how brave he was and how every one admired him.

"She certainly does put it on thick!" thought Peter. "And likes it thick!" he added, in recollection of the ride from Paris.

"My arm blushes!" Phil wrote on his pad in reply.

"How clever!" exclaimed Lady Violet.

She must write on his arm, too. Writing on Phil's arm bid fair to become a fad with the Truckleford lot. What was she to say? She never had an idea when she wanted one, which was something understood by her friends but most puzzling to herself. All she could think of was three millions.

"This is Lady Violet Dearing, and I don't know of anything that has ever appealed to me so much as the wonderfully brave fight you have made," she wrote at last. "Every day that Henriette brought news that you were better I felt like cheering, it was so splendid."

"Thank you, Lady Violet," he replied.

Talk ran around him but always had him in mind, this man with head swathed in bandages, unable to speak or see or hear for present purposes, who had become a romantic figure since it was known that he would inherit three millions.

"And he does not know!" exclaimed Madame Ribot suddenly. "It does seem a pity." She smiled her best with a kind of challenge to Peter.

"Well," he responded and in a way that made everybody silent. This business of the giving of three millions was in nowise as wonderful to him as to them. He had long ago decided on the gift and merely bided the time of announcement. "Well," he repeated as he rose; and, with a peculiar smile to Madame Ribot, added: "I think he is well enough now. You may write it, Miss Ribot, as I dictate it. So: 'Peter is speaking, Phil, and he is telling you that he has made a will that makes you his heir when he goes over the river—but with the exception of two or three hundred thousand dollars in bequests and what I waste on my farm.'"

"Peter!" Phil muttered the one word through

the bandages. Then his hand went out searching for Peter's and held it fast for a long time; while for once everybody on the lawn at tea at the Trucklefords' was silent. Finally he wrote on his pad: "I shall try to be worthy of it. Yes, I'll assist you in ruining the farm in any way you say."

"It's Phil, all right!" exclaimed Peter, with a satisfied laugh. "I am backing him!" That was all there was to it—this dramatic episode.

"Ripping!" remarked one of the young officers.

Madame Ribot's foot was softly tapping the sward as she watched Phil on Henriette's arm leaving the grounds. Dr. and Mrs. Sanford and Peter followed, and silently until they passed under the Oral Surgery sign, when Peter said:

"I did not mean to do it that way. I was going to let Helen tell it for me, but somehow she makes three millions seem insignificant. They were interested in the three millions over at the Trucklefords'. I had passed my word, and if I didn't tell it might look—well, it gave them something to pass the time at tea, and I'm backing Phil. That's all there is to it, backing Phil, leaving it to him."

On her way back to her quarters Helen was conscious that she was following the path; conscious of having answered the greeting of people whom she knew in passing. She would not have noticed the letter waiting for her on the table in

the hall of the nurses' quarters unless her attention were called to it. She took it up with only a casual glance until she had closed the door of her room when the firm's name on the left-hand corner of the envelope recalled the fact that she had an exhibition of drawings on in New York. This was the first steadying fact, a life-buoy to grasp at, in the misery that had overwhelmed her. When she tore open the envelope a number of newspaper clippings fluttered out. On one she caught a glimpse of the name of Ribot in a headline, which had such a banal effect that she let the clipping lie where it had fallen.

"As I have written already, the first week in October was the only time I had open," she was reading the manager's letter mechanically at first. "But it does not seem to matter when Miss Helen Ribot exhibits. As for your *succès d'estime*, read the enclosed reviews. More to the point, perhaps, is that I have already sold fifteen of your drawings. Thinking that this might be as welcome as the clippings, I enclose a check for a thousand dollars on account.

"As to your question about settling in America, I know that M. Vailliant advises against it; but my answer to him is that art is international and any artist works best in the surroundings which he likes best. One does or does not become an American. If you catch our spirit, as I think you will, then your place is secure, whether you do

what you call real drawings or something more popular. I prefer your real drawings—and more of them, please.

"I want another exhibition in the spring and shall reserve the last week in February for you unless I hear otherwise, hoping, however, that you will be with us before then. Let me know your steamer and I shall meet you at the pier. My wife joins me in asking you to stay with us until you have found a satisfactory studio.

"P. S. Won't you send a photograph of yourself? One of the magazines which is making a special article on your work wants it. Perhaps you have something which some friend has drawn of you; or, better, which you have done of yourself."

The letter pointed the way; it threw out the bridge on the other side of the promised land.

"And a picture of myself!" she thought, when she caught a glimpse of herself in the mirror. "No, I'll not send that." They would have to see her, though, and they would say in America, as everywhere else, How plain she is!

"I don't have to exhibit my face, though!" she declared defiantly. "I needn't meet people except those who have to do with my work."

Those unfinished sketches which she took out of her trunk for examination still seemed to have been done by another hand. She had lost her zest. The world wanted her drawings and she

was not caring whether or not she ever made another one—that was the truth of her mood tonight. But she thought of herself as tired. A long walk after dinner and a good sleep would clear the cobwebs out of her mind. Yet she was looking out of her window at the stars after midnight and saw the sun-up after a restless night.

Once in America she would begin afresh; all her old verve and love of art would return. She could not start too soon. Leave to go to Paris, first! Bricktop could arrange this and meanwhile she could get her discharge from the hospital. She would go—go! She could not wait another day.

“ Well, soon I’ll have his harness off and then Phil can speak,” said Bricktop, who had a slack half-hour and was in a talking mood, which meant that you had to follow his lead or rather trail on his swell like a small boat in tow of a fast cruiser. “ And let me tell you that if he hadn’t had a good constitution and a nerve of steel there wouldn’t have been a chance. Another thing—you! You gave the inspiration to his will that kept the blood going out into the veins of all that tissue that had to wait to be fitted into its place. Why, you and I, Helen, have done a stunt that makes me wonder if the good Lord did not give a special dispensation to my clumsy old fingers in this case! ”

She had heard this before. It helped her now and it hurt, too, as she listened, trying to smile.

"And he——"

"Yes, while I get my breath you may put in a word edgewise," continued Bricktop, with a gesture of amused condescension.

"He will be quite as he was before?"

"Quite, as I keep repeating. A few little scars that will go away in time. You see, it was a peculiar kind of side-wipe; doesn't need much skin grafting. Why, what you can do with people's faces! If everybody were taken young nobody need be bad-looking. We straighten crooked teeth, reconstruct mouths. Why not faces? Why, there was a woman in New York who felt badly about her face and I gave her a brand-new one. Could have had plenty of patients of that kind and made loads of money. It might have been 'Bricktop on Beauty' instead of 'Bricktop on Jaws.' Suggestion was too alliterative—I stuck to jaws."

Helen was laughing. One had to laugh when Bricktop, red-headed, freckled, with a manner as distinctly his own as any great comedian's, was going full tilt. Besides, they were comrades, these two; they understood each other.

"Why shouldn't everybody be pleasing to the eye? They will be, one of these days," he went on excitedly. "Why, Helen, I could make you good-looking——"

He clapped his hand over his mouth.

"My mother said that I would talk myself to death some day!" he gasped. "Well, I've said it!"

She was smiling at his confusion in a way that cured it.

"You could! You could!" she exclaimed banteringly, as if she were teasing him for such a good opinion of himself.

"Yes, you bet I could!" he declared.

"Even my nose?" she said, with a defiant sort of scepticism.

Before she could prevent him he had thumb and forefinger on that nose and was pinching it and feeling of it in a way that made her cry out, "Stop!" indignantly and draw away.

"Perfectly easy! You have the cartilage for a Number One nose," he went on, his professional eagerness undisturbed. "All that happened was that the good Lord intended to make you fine-looking—and only the nose stands in the way—and was called off on a hurry case before He had sculped down the material. There's too much of it!"

"I know it!" proclaimed Helen defiantly.

Bricktop was making gestures in his habitual fashion to indicate what he would do with that curse of hers if he were to have a chance.

"Why, I wouldn't need to leave any scar ex-

cept just in the dip of the nostril and under the point, where they wouldn't show." His professional ambition was excited; a greedy look was in his eyes. "Shame! Absolute shame not to do it! Unfair to your friends, unfair to yourself—to everybody!"

"Of all the ridiculous——" gasped Helen, breaking again into laughter of the kind that hides that undercurrent of seriousness which often gives to badinage its cutting edge.

"Come on! It's a cinch!" pleaded Bricktop. "Just bandages over your nose for two weeks, then bandages off and everybody saying what a good-looking woman Helen is. Come on!"

People would say that she was good-looking, all for the ridiculous business of making some cuts in her nose! Imagine her going about while her nose was bandaged! Preposterous! But in America, where nobody knew her? Some little scars that nobody would notice!

"Can you get me leave? Can I go away somewhere?" she asked.

"Yes. You are attached to my shop, now."

"And then to America!" she exclaimed.

"What! To America! You!"

"I'm going to become a citizeness."

"Good!" cried Bricktop. Back of his enthusiasm was more than welcome to his native land. It meant that she could not be heart-broken

because there was another in her place—or, didn't it mean that?

"When will you do the starting?" she asked. "The sooner the better!"

"Now!" answered Bricktop. "And I'll send you away in my car—needn't go to bed!"

"I'll run and pack my things—and I'll say good-bye to Cousin Phil, for I shan't see him again!"

She was proud of the matter-of-course manner of the remark. This perfectly fantastic business of having her nose remodelled had put her in the mood which should make light of everything.

It took her only a half-hour to pack. Her wardrobe was simple and her speed in keeping with that of people who have simple wardrobes was heightened by a delirious excitement. She was going, going! She did not want to wait another day, another hour. In America all would be right—fortune and new friends; another Helen Ribot. The determination and courage which had faced Phil's wound and helped to bring him back to life had not allowed her to think of him, except that she must say good-bye to him. She was galvanised by her own will, compelling a philosophy which should let nothing interfere with its light-hearted measure as she entered the ward.

There he was, sitting in his chair as she had seen him for many weeks. An end of all writ-

ing of messages; of the hand-clasps of good-morning and good-night; of a texture of existence woven into his—but "Stop!" said will. The thing was over! Hurry down the curtain! Avoid melodramatic anti-climaxes! How glad she was that he had thought of her as visiting him rarely and as more interested in her drawings than in him! And she was more interested in them than in any man that ever was or would be! There was no joy, no career for her except to make white paper live with her touch. Now she knew herself. That letter had closed all doors behind her and opened doors into another existence. She had wrought herself into a state of mind which enabled her to take his hand in the accustomed way, with no more thrill than if it were any one else's. She was proud of the firmness as she wrote:

"It is Helen. I'm in great luck. My exhibition in New York is a success and I am going to America immediately. I came to say good-bye."

"Helen!"

He had not waited to write the word. It came out quite clearly. He was drawing her nearer to him with his hand-clasp, as he had before. Now he would be touching her hair as he had before; but instead, his other hand, groping, had caught her arm. She was in a vise, dazed. Then all that she had reasoned out of herself came surging back in consuming possession of her. Oh,

God, why would he do that! What did he mean? It could not be—no, it could not be! She tried to draw away, but the effort was only a quiver.

"I can write better. My pad, please," he murmured.

It seemed very heavy and then very light to her as she brought it, tremblingly, wonderingly. A peal of bells was ringing soft notes in her ears and her brain was numb. She watched each letter as it was written, tracing out her fate. For she had admitted the thing to her heart, now. She could never put it out.

"It is hard to explain, but something told me that it was you—your spirit, your touch that first day when I should have slipped but for you—and yet I knew it could not be. The pain devils never let me think quite clearly. Then you had seemed to avoid me and Henriette had said she would wait. It was understood with Henriette. It must be she; it was her place—and all the while your spirit, your touch, you in my mind and her face, her presence, and it hurt me to think that you neglected me. This awful wound—and you said that you were Henriette when I could not see and it should have been Henriette. And I was always thinking, musing, in my poor, hazy way of the girl with her cartoons and sketches—of you as I saw you seated against the wheat shock, across the table at Truckleford, rise on the other side of the shell-hole—everywhere you, the spirit of you

—that, well, it had me. Then I found out what the plot was and I was happy and about to tell you, when the pain devils interfered. Then I concluded to wait. Being shut up in my own world, perhaps I liked to watch the play. If you could take Henriette's place and deceive me, how could you care for me? I enjoyed the comedy yesterday at Lady Truckleford's with something akin to your own mischievousness. But when you say that you are going away—well, I can't let you go if there is any way of keeping you. Only you must not go without knowing that it is you, your spirit, which has pulled me through—you that I love. And you—do *you* care?"

"Big and little, all kinds of yes, in every language!" she replied. "Yes, every hour through all these weeks and long before that."

"I like the way you say it—it is so like you!" he wrote in answer. And he drew her close to him again and held her so for a long time.

"I was about to——" Mischief and happiness were mixed in her explanation of the thing that Bricktop was about to undertake on her behalf.

"It does not matter to me—not if your nose were twice as large."

"But it does to me," she replied. "I am tired of feeling that I am looking over a mountain top every time that I tie my shoe-laces. Phil, we'll be getting our new faces at the same time, and I

want to be as pleasing to you as I can. I'm a human woman."

He was smiling inwardly at this, if he could not yet with the muscles that nature intended for the purpose.

"And by the time that you can see me it will be the same Helen, only the Helen I want you to see always," she said, in final decision of her purpose not to delay acting on such a good impulse.

"I'm ready—and I'm so happy! Come on, Mr. Bricktop on Beauty!" she said, as she entered his office.

Bricktop emitted what he would have called a Comanche yell, which was utterly against the regulations about noise in that smooth-running, quiet British hospital; and the cause it was not due to her readiness for the operation, but rather to his prompt diagnosis of the reason for the happiness beaming and rippling in her eyes.

When Henriette heard the news which her mother brought to her room to avoid the embarrassment of her hearing it first from Lady Violet, who was babbling it in loud whispers right and left, Madame Ribot drew back in face of her daughter's anger, else she might herself have been the victim of such a blow as Helen had once received. Madame Ribot, irritatingly convinced that Peter Smithers had been having quiet fun at

her expense on the ride from Paris, was inclined to lay the blame for the embarrassing situation at the door of this unspeakable vulgarian. She meant to cut him dead if she saw him again; but when it occurred to her that he would not mind, she was only the more irritated. Now she was concerned with the effect of defeat on Henriette, who, after her tempest, was silent, with eyes half closed and staring.

"Yes," said Henriette finally. "I'm not surprised." Her pride would not allow her to say so, but the battle from the first had been, to her mind, between her beauty which, by her criterions, ought to conquer, and something in Helen which frustrated it. "Yes," she repeated, turning to her mirror to arrange a strand of hair. She smiled into the mirror in her old conceit of self and the mirror smiled back. There are many fish in the sea!

"Good!" exclaimed Madame Ribot. "And Helen gets a great fortune," she added.

"Yes."

"I must go and see her!" said Madame Ribot.

But Helen was not at her quarters. No one knew where she had gone, except Bricktop, who said that he had sent her away in Peter's car for a rest. But after her plea of parental right he directed her to the little house which Peter had taken for the Sanfords.

Helen was sitting in a long chair in the small

garden, punctuating the happiness of two white heads and of Peter himself by her remarks about her nose, which was in bandages, and how she was going to help Peter ruin his farm; which he said she could ruin in any way she pleased without regard to priority of claim in that line by either himself or Phil.

Instead of cutting Peter, when she was actually in the presence of the personified millions Madame Ribot was most affable to him, as well as to the Sanfords, speaking of the common feelings of mothers when she embraced Mrs. Sanford. To Helen she was demonstratively maternal, kissing her on the forehead and cheek many times and stroking her hand; and Helen reciprocated, the light in her eyes welcoming belated affection long craved, which crowned her happiness. When they spoke of her coming to America, Madame Ribot expressed her delight, but in her inner consciousness, despite her flare, something cold and logical built of the past and her predilections told her that she would never go. And that same day she slipped away to Paris and back to her old routine.

The next time that Phil sat under the portrait of the English ancestor and facing the American ancestor the Jehovah cablegram, now framed, was also on the wall. There were still some patches of plaster on his chin, but otherwise he looked the

same; only there had come to him a great experience of battle, of suffering, of reflection, taking youth over the boundary into a manhood which still might be boyish.

Across from him in her old place was Helen, while Peter made the seventh of the party. Phil could see her as clearly as the first night that he was at Truckleford; he could hear every inflection in her voice, though the doctors said that he must have a long rest, free from shocks. In the lamplight the tiny scars on the lobes of her nose did not show, and he rather wished that they did. He did not want them to go away.

"You know, Helen is really very good-looking," the vicar had said again and again to his wife, who kept replying that it was perfectly evident.

The high white forehead, the fine eyes, the glorious hair—they were no longer under a handicap, as Peter put it. Mischievous challenge was still the privilege of the eyes and the expressive mouth seemed always smiling these days. The Helen that the world saw was the real Helen, radiant with the spirit that had kept a man from slipping and cried "Good!" after that upper cut, which was still a source of many chuckles to the vicar and the Marquis of Truckleford.

The call was home. She was eager for her first glimpse of the valley of Longfield; to be welcomed at the station by Bill Hurley. "One be-

comes an American, or he does not; " she was one already.

" I should not need any one to direct me," she said. " Across the bridge, up Maple Avenue, turn to the left in front of the ancestor along the path under the elms—and that is it, a simple, old frame house in a yard facing the biggest elm of all."

" Don't forget the farm!" Peter suggested. " I don't mean to be as lonely as I have been."

She smiled to Peter in the way that he liked to have her smile at him.

" For that, you follow the main road past the ancestor on up the hill. Turn in between two great stone pillars and keep along a winding drive which gives you glimpses of herds grazing, and you will come to another simple frame house. Then keep along another drive on that little farm past screens of larches and the garage and you will come to the stables and the dairy and the barns."

" Right!" said Peter. " By George! I believe it's time I enlarged that house or built a new one, or the big barn will get ashamed of it."

The two white heads of Truckleford felt that they, too, knew Longfield. Their promise was given that one day they would undertake that formidable journey from their insular home across the Atlantic and taste Virginia ham and sweet corn on their native heath. Peter had told them how he would send them spinning over the

highways to the suburbs of Boston, to Cape Cod and the White Mountains, and skirting the gleaming silver of the Hudson to Manhattan, where the skyscrapers rise from their granite beds.

Only the presence of Bricktop was needed to round out this dinner party at the vicarage; but he was too busy in France making the relatives and the sweethearts of other maimed men rejoice, to accept any invitations.

"I was backing Phil," Peter mused, after he had lighted his cigar; and, as Bill Hurley had repeatedly said, Peter was "nobody's fool."

"Phil ain't, either," Bill concluded, after he saw the girl that Phil brought home from the wars.

THE END

Ben